

A
WOMAN'S WAY

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A WOMAN'S WAY



VOLUME XIII

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BY
THOMPSON BUCHANAN
Author of "Life," etc.



WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY
WALTER PRICHARD EATON

GARDEN CITY NEW YORK
DOUBLEDAY, PAGE & COMPANY
1915

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INTRODUCTION

“A Woman’s Way” belongs to a class of comedy curiously rare on our native stage in recent seasons, the comedy of smart people, with a flavor of character study to give it dignity. It has never, to be sure, particularly abounded in America. Mrs. Mowatt’s “Fashion,” produced in 1845 (which Edgar Allan Poe said resembled the “School for Scandal” “as the shell resembles the living locust”), was the first smart comedy written by a native author, and it was largely satirical of pretended smartness. There were not many in the ensuing decades, and, until Bronson Howard’s plays appeared, none worthy of consideration. Clyde Fitch, however, worked industriously and well in the vineyard of upper Fifth Avenue. “The Climbers,” “The Girl with the Green Eyes,” “Her Own Way,” “The Truth,” and other comedies from his pen were plays about smart people, stiffened with the dignity of character study and not lacking in social satire. But Fitch was comparatively alone in his field. Although such plays have been few in America, our heterogeneous democracy

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making rather for the play of "character types," or for middle-class realism, they seem, however, always to have been popular when well written, and "A Woman's Way" is no exception.

Mr. Buchanan's comedy was produced by Miss Grace George for the first time on January 7, 1909, in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, after only eight rehearsals. Fortunately, however, this ridiculous lack of preparation was atoned for by a month of performances on the road before the New York opening, which took place on the afternoon of February 22, 1909, at the Hackett Theatre (now the Harris). For this New York performance the cast was as follows:

<i>Marion Stanton</i>	. . . . .	GRACE GEORGE
<i>Howard Stanton</i>	. . . . .	FRANK WORTHING
<i>Mrs. Blakemore</i>	. . . . .	DOROTHY TENNANT
<i>Oliver Whitney</i>	. . . . .	ROBERT WARWICK
<i>General Livingstone</i>	. . . . .	CHARLES STANLEY
<i>Mrs. Livingstone</i>	. . . . .	RUTH BENSON
<i>Mrs. Stanton</i>	. . . . .	EVELYN CARRINGTON
<i>Bobby Livingstone</i>	. . . . .	HENRY MILLER, JR.
<i>Salie Livingstone</i>	. . . . .	JEWELL POWER
<i>Bert Morris</i>	. . . . .	FREDERICK ESMELTON
<i>Mrs. Morris</i>	. . . . .	MARY FERMIER
<i>Lynch</i>	EDWARD FIELDING
<i>Wilson</i>	REGINALD CARRINGTON
<i>Bates</i>	GREGORY BURTON

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Miss George continued at the same playhouse until the closing of the theatres in June, and the following autumn took the play on a tour which lasted for a year and a half. The comedy was then "released for stock," as the phrase is, and at once demonstrated that its initial success was due to its own merits as well as to the splendid performances which Miss George and Mr. Worthing had been giving. Miss George is a delicate, expert, and charming comedienne, and Frank Worthing, though underrated by the public, who as a rule really know little or nothing about acting as an art, was recognized by everybody in his profession as one of the most expert actors on the American stage. For all-round proficiency, in fact, he had no equal, and he has had, as yet, no worthy successor. But "A Woman's Way" could stand on its own feet. Twenty-seven American stock companies selected it for their opening bill the first summer after its release, and twenty more different productions followed that season. It has been in constant demand ever since, averaging to the present time about twenty-five weeks a year. The play was also produced at the Comedy Theatre in London, where it ran for fifteen weeks, but as it was "adapted" for British consumption by Cosmo Ham-

ilton, neither its success nor failure there need concern us. An "adapted" play is too often, like Leigh Hunt's translated poem, "a boiled strawberry."

Thompson Buchanan, the author, was born in New York City on June 21, 1877, his father, the Reverend Anselan Buchanan, being an assistant at St. George's Church. The little boy was brought up, however, in Kentucky, by his grandmother, "whose idea was," he says, "that a boy should ride, shoot, swim, fight, and read Sir Walter Scott"—all of which he did industriously. He entered the University of the South (Sewanee), where he was captain of the track team and left halfback on the football team, as well as an editor of the college paper. After graduation he joined the staff of the *Louisville Commercial*, then later that of the *Courier-Journal*. In 1898 he enlisted in the First Kentucky Volunteer Infantry, serving in Porto Rico, and in 1899 served as lieutenant and adjutant in the First Kentucky National Guards during the Goebel troubles. Mr. Buchanan came to New York City in 1903, and joined the staff of the *New York Evening Journal*, which would not seem a very likely training school for a serious literary career: He remained on that unfortunately ubiquitous paper four years, meanwhile writing two novels,

“The Castle Comedy” and “Judith Triumphant,” which were published by the Harpers. Then he began to write plays, plugging away persistently, and seven times getting so hopefully close to the goal that advance money was paid to him, but always failing of the coveted production. In 1908 a play, “The Intruder,” was at last performed in Boston—just once. “It was rotten,” he declares, “so I wrote ‘A Woman’s Way’—and there you are.”

Perhaps as sure a receipt as any for writing a successful play is to forget the “rotten” one and begin anew! At any rate, it illustrates Mr. Buchanan’s cheerful temperament, and perhaps something of the pragmatism a newspaper life breeds.

To the lay reader, the amateur, “A Woman’s Way” may very well seem, in type, a trifle disappointing. It lacks, undoubtedly, literary polish of dialogue, a polish, by the way, which would be less realistic in the speech of the smart set than in the talk of certain humbler folk. It lacks, too, epigrammatic brilliance, which might conceivably be equally unrealistic, but which convention much more readily accepts as an attribute of smart people. The Stanton library, however, is not the drawing-room of Lady Windemere; it is on upper Fifth Avenue, not Carlton House

Terrace, and the epigrams do not crackle. The dialogue has a certain downright American bluntness which sounds, sometimes, more plausible on the stage than pleasant on the page; and the humors of this dialogue lie far less in the gift of phrase than in the "pointing" of situations—not what is said, by itself, is comic, but what is said to cap a situation carefully developed by the dramatist. This sort of comedy, we need scarcely add, is by far the more effective in actual performance, though it demands of the reader a greater exercise of the imagination.

But it is just on that account that we think the publication of "A Woman's Way" is of most value. "The Importance of Being Earnest" can be read with almost as much pleasure and almost as much ease as it can be watched in performance, though the performance, if a good one, adds a new element of delight, of course. Mr. Shaw's "Getting Married" can be read with considerably more pleasure and ease. But Mr. Buchanan's comedy, lacking these distinctively literary elements which make the Shaw and the Wilde works such easy reading, demands an effort on our part to grasp its significance as successful drama. We have to look for those elements which underlie and interline the dialogue, those elements

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supplied by the performers on the stage, which of course exist in every good play, making it, indeed, a play instead of a printed dialogue or short story told between quotation marks. If we make this effort successfully, we have learned just so much more about the art of the theatre, about the craft of the dramatist and the actor.

It is fairly obvious that what caused Miss Grace George to produce "A Woman's Way" was the part of *Marion Stanton*, and that what most concerned Mr. Buchanan in writing the play was likewise the part of *Marion Stanton*. He may or he may not have had a definite actress in mind when he wrote (certainly he could hardly have done better than to keep Miss George before his eyes); but he certainly worked with the primary purpose of giving the leading player an opportunity to act. This is a perfectly legitimate purpose, as legitimate as the purpose to preach a social or economic gospel, or to mirror a phase of society, or create poetry, or coin epigrams. Moreover, it is not incompatible with these other purposes. On the contrary, the dramatist who does not in some measure consciously and intelligently supply his players with a chance to act is no more likely to succeed on the stage than a composer who

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neglects the vocal parts of his opera, though his orchestration may be thrice triumphant. We have had rather too much emphasis placed of late upon the intellectual and "literary" side of the drama, to the neglect of the actors. We have even bred a race of younger critics who never speak of the acting at all, or, when they do, painfully display their ignorance. We must not forget that the players are one of the elements which differentiate the acted drama from all other arts; that the actor's art, indeed, constitutes half the appeal of the playhouse to the public. The great dramatist writes both to utter his personal philosophy of life and to create "acting parts" whereby that philosophy may be made potent through the medium of the players, whom he gladly recognizes as his allies; or even he may create his acting parts for the sheer joy of making possible this dear human game of make-believe, inventing characters for the love of seeing them acted. The artist with a "purpose" in the narrow sense has enriched our latter-day drama, of course, but he is in danger of becoming a bit of a nuisance, none the less. The greatest drama, at any rate, is the drama of character, not alone because character endures after philosophic moods or social conditions change and vanish, but because

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great characters give the players the widest opportunity for the exhibition of their art, and the public loves acting above moralizing in the theatre, above epigrams and fine writing of all sorts. That is why the enduring dramas will always be found to have been written for the practical stage, and very often for definite groups of players. A dramatist who does not love and understand the actor's art, and does not write with the demands of this art clearly in mind, may win a lasting place on the library shelves, but never in the theatre.

Well, Mr. Buchanan wrote with the players in mind. He wrote to give an actress an opportunity to display varying emotions, to exercise varying feminine wiles, to portray a charming character, at once womanly and self-reliant (if we may be pardoned the contrast!), wistful and proud, gentle and full of sharp humor. To set such a woman, innocent in spite of her smart worldliness, over against another woman of a quite different type, and show her in a battle for her husband's love, is not entirely a new expedient in the drama; for that matter, what new expedients are there? But if this woman is freshly created, if she is a living being, moving among other living characters in an environment plausibly of to-

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day, her story is as new as this morning's sunrise, after all. So what troubled Mr. Buchanan was evidently to make *Marion Stanton* of flesh and blood, to put her in situations where the actress portraying her could show us all her wiles, all her charm, her innocence and her worldliness, her brave humor and her moments of despair. In reading this comedy, first of all then, read it from the point of view of an actress about to play the leading rôle. It is from this angle that you will best appreciate its dramatic values.

It will be noticed, too, that Mr. Buchanan does not shirk his dramatic responsibilities in this play. It was long ago noted, by Sarcey and others, that in every drama there are certain "inevitable" scenes, that is to say, certain scenes which an audience is made curious to witness. But not every dramatist writes these scenes, nonetheless. Many a play has failed because the author put his "inevitable" scene between curtains. In this comedy, it is "inevitable" that the wife and the other woman should meet in the presence of the husband, and that they should come to open grapple under the very eyes of the audience. That is the tussle the audience was keyed to witness. Mr. Buchanan has recognized and ac-

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cepted this fact, and he comes right down to business without delay. The joy of his comedy, of course, in no small measure is due to the fact that the other woman is not at all the sort of antagonist the wife expected; that she is, in fact, charming, with a worldly poise quite equal to the occasion. The battle issue is not so plain, then, as *Marion* (and we, also) had been led to expect; consequently the suspense is well maintained to the end, and there is constant opportunity for the players.

The play makes effective use of the device of reiteration for comic effect, a device essentially for the theatre, not the printed page. It is difficult to say just why, but when we read how *Marion* adjusted her husband's tie, and then how the other woman tied it, and then how *Marion* came back into the room and declared he had mussed it again, we are not particularly amused; while the same process, when we witness it on the stage, enacted by living players, is irresistibly comic. Similarly, as man after man at this strange dinner party calls the other woman *Puss*, we are but mildly titillated as we read; but, once more, when we hear this ridiculous endearment come forth from the lips of the actors, it grows more and more comic, for it is an expressive monosyllabic sym-

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bol of the gathering indictment against *Marion's* enemy. There is no wit in the word *Puss*; the wit is in the situation.

These are but hints, of course, to guide the reader toward a better understanding of this play's value as practical drama. The comedy has, as far as we know, not the slightest pretence of a "message." It does not even bear any evidence of being in the least shocked at the somewhat questionable ethical code which appears to prevail among its male personages. It takes a group of idlers as it finds them, judges them to be human, is confident that they are amusing and not unpleasant to know, and proceeds to build with them an interesting story, which shall permit the players plain opportunity for the worthy and well-bred exercise of their art. The stage always has room for such works—it always has more room than is occupied; and "A Woman's Way" will probably continue to hold an honorable place in the repertoire of the American theatre for many years to come.

WALTER PRICHARD EATON.

Stockbridge, Massachusetts.

CHARACTERS

GEN. LIVINGSTONE
MRS. LIVINGSTONE
MR. LYNCH
SALIE LIVINGSTONE
MRS. STANTON
MRS. BLAKEMORE
BOB LIVINGSTONE
OLIVER WHITNEY
MRS. BELLE MORRIS
MR. MORRIS
WILSON
HOWARD STANTON
MARION STANTON

ACT I

SCENE: *Library in HOWARD STANTON'S house on upper Fifth Avenue, opposite the park.*

TIME: *A morning in early spring.*

ACT II

SCENE: *Same as Act I except that the room is brilliantly lighted and evidently prepared for company.*

TIME: *Thursday evening in the week following the events of Act I.*

ACT III

SCENE: *Dining-room in HOWARD STANTON'S house.*

NOTE: This play is printed from the prompt copy used by Miss Grace George in the New York production. It is, therefore, primarily an acting version, and by the exercise of common judgment any group of amateurs should be able to produce it successfully without going to the expense of a paid coach. The author is not interested in so-called "literary dramas." Plays are intended to be acted, and if they do not "act" they are no good as plays; effective drama lies in the spoken word. This comedy acts much better than it reads, and when read it should be read aloud. As this is a stage version, the stage directions are from the standpoint of the actor, RIGHT being the actor's right, LEFT, etc., the actor's left. THE AUTHOR.

A WOMAN'S WAY

Act 1

ACT I

SCENE: *The library in HOWARD STANTON'S house on upper Fifth Avenue, opposite the park. It is a large room furnished handsomely and in excellent taste. The prevailing color scheme is red and black. The walls and the curtains are rich red, the furniture dark. There is a general air of much wealth, and in part the room jars somewhat as though two minds had met in conflict over the decorations and appointments. At the left two windows overlook the park. Although it is a delightful spring morning, the curtains are tightly drawn over these. At the rear double doors let in from the main hall. At the right upper stage a single door leads to other parts of the house. Large handsome fireplace with marble mantel down stage right. Above the mantel a picture of a coach and four. On the wall are a number of handsome paintings. For the most part they are pictures of action, such as hunting or battle scenes. Mixed in with them are a number of rather sporting cuts. That part of the wall space not occupied by mantel, windows,*

or doors is taken up with bookcases that reach up about five feet. On top of the bookcases at intervals are vases and pieces of statuary. A statue of the Greek discus thrower stands on a pedestal in the upper left-hand corner of the room. A handsome library table stands near the centre of the room, but a little to the left holding a large electrolier; on either side of it are large comfortable chairs. A long sofa near the fireplace on the right facing the audience and other comfortable seats about the room. A small fire burns in the fireplace.

TIME: *A morning in early spring.*

DISCOVERED: *HOWARD STANTON asleep with newspaper over face in a big comfortable chair to the right of the library table. He is tall, well groomed, smooth-faced, the type of modern young man in a certain set, physically brave to the point of recklessness, but morally weak-fibred, impressionable, easily led, and wax in the hands of a clever woman. He is proud and has inherited great wealth. At the present time he is evidently in trouble. His right arm is in a sling. The library table is piled high with newspapers and there are more on the floor, where they have*

been carelessly thrown. WILSON, a grave, rather fat and very unctuous butler, is standing above sofa right, reading papers. Telephone buzzes as curtain rises. WILSON goes to 'phone.

WILSON [*putting papers on back of sofa*]. Yes, yes, this is Mr. Stanton's. I can't speak no louder. Yes, Mr. Howard Stanton. Who is it you say? Oh, the *Journal*. No, sir, I wish you wouldn't; this is the eighth time you've called this morning. Mr. Stanton will not speak with you. [*Moves away from 'phone to centre. 'Phone buzzes. WILSON goes back to 'phone.*] Yes, yes. Oh, the *World*, you say. I don't know, sir. I can't say. Automobile accident? I don't know anything about it. I know you've called nine times this morning. I don't know nothing about Mr. Stanton and no other woman. I don't know nothing about Mrs. Stanton. I don't know nothing about nothing. He won't speak to no one. [*WILSON leaves 'phone and goes left centre. 'Phone buzzes again. WILSON goes back to 'phone.*] Yes, yes. Oh, the *Post*. You say—I don't know, I can't say. The *Post*? It sounds very much like the same voice that called this morning and said he was the *Journal*. The *Journal*! Oh, no, sir. I didn't say

you were that. I didn't call you any names. What? Go to where? I won't go there, I say there, I say I won't.

[WILSON takes up papers.]

STANTON [*seated left*]. Oh! oh! [*Evidently in pain. Irritably—paper falls from his face.*] Wilson, why wasn't I born with three hands?

WILSON [*startled*]. I—I—couldn't say, sir.

STANTON [*peevishly*]. If I had three hands I could have used two of them to manage that damned machine. Motoring with women, Wilson, will never be a safe sport until we grow men with three hands.

WILSON [*centre*]. Yes, sir! Will you have the papers, sir?

STANTON [*looking ruefully at huge pile on table and floor*]. Thought I had 'em all this side of Chicago.

WILSON [*centre*]. You have the morning papers and first afternoon editions. There is another edition out, sir. [*Offers half a dozen of the papers. On top is edition of Evening Journal with the headline "Divorce" in huge letters across the front page.*] Thought you might like to see this, sir. [*Holds up Journal so the headline can be read by the audience.*]

STANTON [*sarcastically*]. Very thoughtful of you, Wilson.

WILSON. Yes, sir. Thank you, sir.

STANTON [*sees the headline, shivers*]. You've read that?

WILSON. I—I saw the headlines, sir.

STANTON. In that case I couldn't deprive you of the rest of it, Wilson. Read it aloud to me.

WILSON [*half frightened*]. Yes, sir. [*Reads with the servant's inflection, dropping his h's and with great unction and evident enjoyment.*] "Divorce!"

STANTON. Yes——

WILSON. "Divorce!"

STANTON. You've read that once.

WILSON. Yes, sir, but it's here twice, sir. [STANTON *grunts.*] "In Smart Set to follow sensational automobile accident. Wronged wife hurries to injured husband." [*Quickly, in trepidation.*] It says just that, sir.

STANTON. I don't doubt it, Wilson.

WILSON [*accusingly, with dramatic force*]. "Who is the other woman?"

STANTON. What? [*Half springs out of chair.*]

WILSON. It says that here, sir.

STANTON [*subsiding*]. Oh! Well, don't read it as though you enjoyed it so damned much!

WILSON. Yes, sir. [*Reads with considerably abated*

enthusiasm very hastily.] “That a sensational divorce suit in the Smart Set will follow the mysterious automobile accident in which a gay millionaire was dangerously injured and an unknown beautiful young woman miraculously escaped death, was learned on good authority to-day by a reporter for this paper.”

STANTON. Good authority! Bah!

WILSON. Yes, sir! “Although every effort is being made to shroud the affair in mystery and withhold the identity of the young millionaire and his fair companion, it was definitely established by the *Evening Journal* that the wrecked car belonged to Howard Stanton, the young millionaire sportsman whose sensational escapades have more than once brought him into public notice.”

STANTON. I say, Wilson, are you reading that right?

WILSON. Yes, sir. “At the home of Mr. Stanton all information was denied. Mrs. Stanton arrived late last night. It is——”

STANTON. That will do, Wilson! They don't really know any more than I do—don't see what use there was in buying the damned paper.

[WILSON puts paper on table.]

WILSON. Anything else, sir?

STANTON. Any one call me on the 'phone?

WILSON. Yes, sir; *Journal* eight times, *World* nine times, *Sun*, *Globe*, five times; *Mail*, *Telegram*, *Staats-Zeitung*, one time. I told them you were out, sir.

STANTON. Is that all? You forgot the *Herald*, *Times*, and the *Telegraph*.

WILSON. They're morning papers, sir. It isn't time for them yet.

STANTON. Excuse me, Wilson.

WILSON. Yes, sir; but Police Headquarters and the Coroners' office called.

STANTON [*springing up*]. What? The Coroners' office?

WILSON. Yes, sir. They wanted to know if there was any truth in the report that Mrs. Stanton had attempted suicide when she heard the story.

STANTON [*rises, moves to left around table*]. This is infamous!

WILSON. Yes, sir, but it was the same voice that called eight times before, sir.

STANTON. Don't answer the 'phone if the devil himself calls in person.

WILSON [*goes to 'phone and takes down receiver, comes back and gathers up papers that are on the floor*,

puts them in basket under table]. Yes, sir; anything else, sir?

STANTON [*moves to centre*]. Any one been here to see me?

WILSON. A crowd of young men in front ever since last night, sir. I think they are newspaper men.

STANTON. See if they are still there.

[WILSON *goes to the window left, draws up curtain, peeps cautiously.*]

WILSON. They are there, sir.

STANTON. All of them?

WILSON. Yes, sir, and some more. Five—six—seven photographers, sir. Oh! [*Jumps back from window in dismay, letting curtains fall.*]

STANTON. What's the matter?

WILSON. They've taken my picture, sir.

STANTON. Oh, that's all right—*your* picture.

WILSON. Yes, sir——

STANTON [*centre*]. Anything more? Look again.

[WILSON *with ludicrous care approaches the window, draws back curtain a little, and peeps out.*]

WILSON. Three cabs and a motor, sir, just drove up—more newspaper men, sir. They are waiting for you to come out, sir.

STANTON. They'd better take a lease.

WILSON. Yes, sir. [*Suddenly bursts into a laugh.*]
Beg pardon, sir——

STANTON. Well, what is it? [*Runs over to the window, then remembers and stops abruptly.*] What's the matter, you idiot?

WILSON [*looking out*]. It's Mr. Morris, sir. He just drove up in a hansom. They are taking his picture.

STANTON [*gleefully*]. Fine! [*Tries to peep out, dodging about to keep from being seen.*] What are they doing?

WILSON. They are all of them trying to talk to him at once. He seems a bit agitated like, sir! He's shaking his cane, sir, and they are taking his picture and laughing at him.

[*There comes wild spasmodic ringing of a door bell. STANTON is intensely pleased.*]

STANTON. Go it, Ned!

WILSON. Yes, sir.

STANTON. I think he must want to come in, Wilson. [*Down right.*]

WILSON. Yes, sir——

STANTON. Show him in, you idiot.

WILSON. Yes, sir. [*Turns toward door.*] {

STANTON. Wilson, don't let any of those reporters in.

WILSON. No, sir. But the last time I had to open the front door, one of them put his foot inside the edge and I had to squeeze it. I'm afraid I hurt him.

STANTON. Hurt him! Kill him!

WILSON. Yes, sir! *[Exits hurriedly.]*

[STANTON dances about joyously.]

STANTON *[crossing to above sofa]*. Ned of all people! Great!

[NED MORRIS, his top hat on the back of his head, his cane in his hand, and evidently wild with rage, bursts in centre. Stops and stares in rage at STANTON.]

MORRIS. Well! You have played hell!

[NED MORRIS is thirty-seven, of the legal type, serious, dignified, but short tempered and inclined to be dictatorial. Wears close-cropped moustache and is beginning to enlarge at the waist. Dressed in cutaway coat and silk hat.]

STANTON. Did they take your picture that way, old boy?

MORRIS *[puts his hat and stick on sofa]*. Now look here, Howard. *[Angrily.]* This is no laughing matter—disgracing your family—disgracing me!

STANTON [*right*]. Wait a minute! Wait a minute! Where do you come in?

MORRIS [*centre, angry and pompous*]. I am your sister's husband.

STANTON. Well, any girl's liable to make a mistake—don't be sore on her for that.

MORRIS. What!

STANTON [*bland, convincing*]. Suppose you weren't—what then? Couple of thousand a year. Maybe—maybe not—as it is—nice house, fair girl, good clothes, great grub, wonderful brother-in-law, and even have your picture taken for nothing. You are not in so awful bad.

MORRIS. Look here, Howard, I came up here to help you out of this scrape.

STANTON [*sits on sofa arm*]. I know you did. I just wanted to get it out of your head that you were doing me any favor. It's a part of your job, brother-in-law. That's just why I plugged so hard with Belle for you. Thought it was cheaper giving you her share than paying you all mine to keep me out of trouble. Oh! I'm a business man.

MORRIS [*bitterly*]. Yes. This looks like it. [*Produces another "yellow" paper with the headline "Divorce Scandal" all the way across the top of the front page.*]

STANTON [*moves to left of table, picking up the papers "Divorce" and comparing them*]. Good Lord! Another!

MORRIS [*centre*]. What is it?

STANTON [*left, holds up divorce paper*]. This "divorce" is a pretty good forecast——

MORRIS [*going toward left*]. Great heavens, man, you don't mean that you and Marion have separated?

STANTON. Don't try to throw that front, Ned. You know as well as I know, as well as Marion knows, that she and I have been separated for months——

MORRIS. But she's been living here.

STANTON. Yes—— [*Shrugs shoulders and sits against table left.*] Good house for entertaining, and it's hers anyhow. We've been almost as intimate as two people who don't speak the same language——

MORRIS. What's wrong?

STANTON [*shrugs shoulders*]. I don't know—too much money, I guess. Marion's a splendid girl. Best in the world! She likes me in a way, but—— [*Pause. Puts paper down.*] Hang it, Ned, there ought to be a law preventing kids from marrying until they know their own minds.

MORRIS. Well! You two kicked up a jolly row until you fixed it.

STANTON [*laughs*]. By George! I can see those headlines now. [*Declaims.*] "Lochinvar Outdone! Yale Athlete Carries Off Vassar—[*with enthusiasm*]—Girl in Motor." Gee! she did look good that night.

MORRIS. She looks just as good now. Rather better.

STANTON [*indifferently*]. Yes?

MORRIS. Can't it be fixed, old boy?

STANTON [*rising from table left, goes to window left*]. My dear Ned. [*Shakes his head with something like a sigh.*] There is no record of a man dreaming the same dream twice. When you wake up, you wake up, and when you go to sleep again it's another dream.

MORRIS [*sits on table*]. Then I take it you and Marion have waked up?

STANTON [*nods with show of considerable real feeling*]. It might have been all right with a little place in the country and a couple of kids, but dad's money and Marion's health killed that. Then she went in for society and culture on the side.

MORRIS. And you for sports and chorus on the side.

STANTON [*impatently*]. Oh, cut that preaching!

MORRIS. Well, all I can say is, it's a damned shame it didn't stick. You are both thoroughbreds.

STANTON [*sits in chair left*]. Now you've hit it. Thoroughbreds don't go for double harness. And every time there's a kicking match—I'm kicked. [*Despondently.*] Don't see really what I was born for, unless to give these newspaper chaps something to do. [*Sits left of table.*]

MORRIS [*sits*]. This latest? You and a young woman being injured is true?

STANTON. Absolutely.

MORRIS. Then it must be denied at once.

STANTON. I knew I did right to persuade Belle to marry you—it wasn't an easy task, either.

MORRIS [*impatiently, sits in armchair*]. The woman will keep quiet?

STANTON. She's not proud of it, you know.

MORRIS. Is she in the chorus?

STANTON. No.

MORRIS. Manicure or milliner?

STANTON [*rising*]. Neither.

MORRIS [*rising*]. Good! Then we'll tell Marion it isn't true.

STANTON [*rises*]. What! Lie to Marion? Certainly not. I may be a fool, but I am a gentleman.

MORRIS. Well, something must be done. You must say something to Marion. How will she take it?

STANTON. You never can tell how Marion will take anything. She is as proud as a little Miss Lucifer, and game as a pebble.

MORRIS. She'd never show it if she were hurt.

STANTON. Hurt? I don't see how she can be hurt. She doesn't care. We've been drifting. [*Both at table.*]

MORRIS. With no distinct break?

STANTON. A row now and then, quiet—you know, just drifting.

MORRIS [*impatently*]. Then who is this——

STANTON [*left*]. She is a lady, Ned. And as she is likely to become a close relative of yours, you had better treat her with respect. All you need know for the present is that the accident did occur and she is a *lady!*

MORRIS [*left, rises and in sneering amazement*]. What!

STANTON [*grandiloquently*]. Don't you suppose I am going to protect the reputation of my future wife? A lady can ride in an automobile, you know.

MORRIS. Are you crazy or am I? [*Goes right.*]

STANTON. I'll match you.

WILSON [*appearing from centre*]. A note for Mr. Morris, sir, marked urgent—delivered by messenger.

MORRIS [*comes to WILSON centre, takes note, reads*].
From those newspaper reporters. They want a
statement.

STANTON [*moving up to WILSON, angrily*]. I'm
getting tired of this. Wilson, tell 'em to go to hell——

WILSON [*goes toward door centre*]. Yes, sir. [*Turns
going.*]

MORRIS. No! No! I have an idea——

[*WILSON stops and moves to desk right. MOR-
RIS goes up to him.*]

Tell them if they will go away I will give them a
statement later.

[*WILSON arranges paper, looks toward STAN-
TON, who nods acquiescence.*]

STANTON. Have your own way!

[*WILSON goes.*]

MORRIS. Let me think. Oh! I have an idea!
[*Comes down left to STANTON.*] An emphatic denial
——with a gentle threat of libel——

STANTON. Cut out the gentle——

WILSON enters.

MORRIS. Trust me——

STANTON. Yes, Wilson.

WILSON [*centre*]. Beg pardon, sir, but the newspaper men said they are waiting for Mrs. Stanton to leave your house for her father's, and they hoped if convenient she would go soon, for they had another edition in forty minutes.

STANTON [*down left*]. Such impertinence is beyond bearing. This whole country is being governed by a lot of irresponsibles hiding behind the public opinion they make by lying to and fooling the people through the papers. I won't stand it. [*To centre.*] What business have they to pry into my personal affairs? I won't stand it, I tell you. Which one sent that message, Wilson? I'll thrash him. [*Turning to right centre; turns back.*]

MORRIS. Yes, and have the rest of them take pictures of you while you do it. Then be hauled to a police court and fined by a magistrate who is afraid of them. [*Goes to STANTON and takes him to door up right.*] Now, Howard, be calm, leave it to me.

STANTON [*going toward exit right*]. But, I tell you——

MORRIS [*follows right*]. I'm your lawyer——

[*During this scene WILSON picks up basket and is about to exit centre when MORRIS stops him.*]

STANTON [*still angry*]. All right! [*Exits.*]

[MORRIS *exits, and returns at once.*]

MORRIS. You stay in there and wait—— [*Points to door upper stage right to WILSON.*] Wilson, say to the newspaper men that Mr. Morris will see one—to represent them all.

WILSON. Yes, sir. [*Exits and returns almost immediately.*]

WILSON [*at centre door announcing*]. Mr. Lynch!

[LYNCH *enters. He is a shrewd, clever, but rather cynical-looking man of thirty. Smooth-faced and rather jaunty in appearance. Though naturally cynical, he can be diplomatic and has all the reporter's adaptability in meeting people. As he enters, he gives a quick professional look about the room, photographs it in his mind for descriptive purposes.*]

MORRIS [*trying not to appear condescending*]. I am Mr. Morris, Mr. Stanton's attorney!

LYNCH. Oh, I recognize you, Mr. Morris. We know most of the big lawyers, you know.

[MORRIS *somewhat pleased in spite of himself.*]

MORRIS. Ah! Won't you sit down, Mr Lynch? [*Indicates armchair.*]

LYNCH [*sits in armchair right of library table*]. Thank you.

MORRIS [*stands right centre*]. From the *Journal* or *World*?

LYNCH [*smiling*]. Neither. They would not trust each other.

MORRIS [*relieved*]. Oh, the *Post*?

LYNCH [*amused*]. Wrong again, Mr. Morris. This story only broke last night. The *Post* probably hasn't heard of it yet. I'm from the *City News*. We serve *all* the papers.

MORRIS [*assuming great geniality*]. Well, then, Mr. Lynch, of the *City News*, what can I do for you?

LYNCH. You know the story, Mr. Morris; is it true?

MORRIS. I know certain facts, Mr. Lynch. I must confess that I do not keep abreast of the romances in our yellow journals. When I undertake fiction I choose a more enduring kind.

LYNCH. The story is that a wrecked automobile was found in a ditch beside the road just outside of New Haven, Connecticut. When the car passed through New Haven it had in it a young man who answers the description of Mr. Stanton and a young woman who does not answer the description of Mrs. Stanton. They were found unconscious with the wrecked car and carried away by persons in another

automobile. It is rumored that the woman is desperately injured and the man fatally hurt. The car belonged to Mr. Howard Stanton, and Dr. Aspel was here at this house last night—and a young woman who does answer the description of Mrs. Stanton arrived—in great haste last night.

MORRIS. I cannot say, Mr. Lynch, whether that story is true or not.

LYNCH. You don't care to make a statement?

MORRIS. Oh, yes, I'll make a statement.

LYNCH. Well?

MORRIS. This car of which you speak may or may not be Mr. Stanton's—I cannot say. The man in the car, however, was certainly not Mr. Stanton, and the woman was most certainly not Mrs. Stanton. I wish to say that positively.

LYNCH. Oh, we were quite sure it was not Mrs. Stanton. [*Puts gloves on table.*] Wouldn't have been much of a story if it had been.

MORRIS [*sharply*]. Is there anything else, Mr. Lynch?

LYNCH. Where is Mr. Stanton?

MORRIS. Um—he left two days ago for a trip to North Carolina. I have wired him and expect to be in communication with him shortly. When he re-

turns I am sure he will instruct me to take decisive action with regard to these shameful and libellous innuendos.

LYNCH. And Mrs. Stanton?

MORRIS. She is here, and I am making this statement at her earnest solicitation to put an end to this annoyance.

LYNCH. Then there is not to be a divorce?

MORRIS [*in amazement*]. Divorce? Mr. Lynch, if the papers were more conversant with the lives of the people about whom they busy themselves impertinently and unnecessarily, the stupidity of such a question would be obvious. I think that is all, Mr. Lynch.

LYNCH [*rising and moving toward MORRIS*]. Thank you very much for your statement, Mr. Morris, but will you tell me who was in Mr. Stanton's automobile?

MORRIS [*shrugging his shoulders, and going to entrance right. Speaks in a voice raised so it comes to STANTON*]. Some irresponsible drunken chauffeur on a joy ride. I suppose with his sweetheart, a manicure or a milliner probably.

LYNCH [*pausing on way to the door*]. Forgive one more question. Dr. Aspel's visit?

MORRIS. Certainly. He came to see Mrs. Stanton.

LYNCH. I believe that covers everything.

MORRIS. I hope so——

LYNCH. Good-day, sir.

MORRIS. Good-day, Mr. Lynch. Oh, Mr. Lynch, you won't forget the name?

[LYNCH gets to door, when MORRIS coughs conscientiously. He turns, suppressing a smile, and looks at MORRIS questioningly.]

Mr. Edward Rowland Morris, you know.

LYNCH. I have it correctly. Good-day. [Exits.

[As soon as LYNCH has gone, STANTON emerges hastily from room upper stage right.]

STANTON [angrily]. What the devil do you mean by calling me a drunken chauffeur?

MORRIS [offended]. What would you have me tell him? The truth? I will if you wish. [Starts upper stage angrily.]

LYNCH [appearing at centre door]. I beg your pardon, but I forgot my gloves. [Evidently takes in everything, but his face is kept straight. MORRIS turns toward table.] Don't worry—I see them. [Moves to table, picks up gloves.] You know I frequently forget my gloves when I interview people. [Starts up

stage, then pauses. To MORRIS.] The name is Edward Rowland Morris, isn't it?

MORRIS [*embarrassed*]. Yes——

LYNCH [*affably*]. I wanted to give you full credit for your frank statement, and when a name is not well known I am always particularly careful to get it right. Thank you. [*Turns to STANTON.*] Would you care to discuss motoring—in North Carolina—Mr. Stanton?

STANTON. I don't care to discuss anything. [*Going up right.*]

LYNCH. Will you say who was the lady with you in the car? [*Up after STANTON.*]

STANTON [*angrily*]. No. [*Down right.*]

LYNCH [*down right*]. Will you affirm or deny the report that Mrs. Stanton is about to file suit for divorce?

STANTON. Such a question is too impertinent to answer.

LYNCH. May I see Mrs. Stanton?

STANTON. Certainly not.

MORRIS. I gave you a statement from Mrs. Stanton——

STANTON. Mrs. Stanton is not here at present.

[MARION STANTON *enters right.* She is a

wholesome looking and extremely pretty young woman in her early twenties. Though her face shows character and decision, a sense of humor rather is the predominating characteristic. She is a more clever woman than her husband is a man. She comes in thoughtfully, but her face lights at seeing NED MORRIS. Comes to him, holding out both hands.]

MARION. Why, Ned! When did you get back? You've been neglecting me. I haven't seen you for an age. Where have you been keeping yourself? *[Takes his hands.]*

MORRIS. Been busy, Marion.

[She looks up for the first time, sees LYNCH. An awkward pause, with no introduction.]

LYNCH. Mrs. Stanton, I am Mr. Lynch of the *City News*.

STANTON. Mrs. Stanton has nothing to say to Mr. Lynch.

MARION *[quickly with decision]*. Perhaps I have, Howard. What is it, Mr. Lynch?

LYNCH. We have the story of a divorce suit contemplated by you.

MARION *[laughing]*. Divorce—I? Did you hear that, Howard? *[With sudden seriousness.]* I think

the fact that I am here in Mr. Stanton's house is sufficient answer to such a silly story.

[MORRIS and STANTON are visibly relieved.]

LYNCH. Have you heard the story of Mr. Stanton's accident?

MARION. Yes, indeed. How we have laughed over it. Haven't we, Howard?

STANTON. Yes, I should say we have. [*Trying to laugh.*]

MORRIS. Most amusing. [*Laughing.*]

MARION. I suppose it is so unusual for a man to go motoring these days with his own wife that the papers naturally jumped to the conclusion it must be another woman. It's really too absurd, Mr. Lynch.

LYNCH. Oh, then you were the lady in the car?

MARION [*left centre*]. Of course I was the lady in the car.

LYNCH [*right centre*]. Then allow me to congratulate you, Mrs. Stanton, on your splendid recovery. The lady in the car broke her leg! Good-day. [*Exits.*]

[*The three, left alone, stare at one another.*]

MARION [*in queer tone*]. Broke her leg! [*Moves over to centre table, drops into chair beside it, and buries her face on her arm, her shoulders heaving.* MORRIS looks at her sympathetically, then follows LYNCH out,

with elaborate care. STANTON comes over beside MARION, stands, looking like a fool.]

STANTON [*to MARION, trying to be comforting and not knowing what to say*]. Don't take on so, Marion—please don't. [*No answer, long pause, STANTON more serious and embarrassed than ever.*] She didn't really break her leg. He was only bluffing.

[*The shaking of MARION'S figure continues. She seems convulsed. Coaxingly, STANTON turns to her.*]

Come, Marion!

MARION [*looks up, her face convulsed with laughter. With affected anxiety*]. Didn't she really break her leg?

STANTON [*shocked*]. Marion! You're laughing?

MARION [*going off into fresh peal of laughter*]. Am I? I believe I am. But you see as I haven't the honor of the lady's acquaintance, you can't expect me to be so very sympathetic.

STANTON [*terribly shocked that she takes the situation in this unconventional fashion*]. Marion, I'm ashamed of—

MARION [*interrupting*]. Most self-respecting men would be, dear.

STANTON [*haughty, angry, and completely non-plussed*]. I don't, I cannot—explain. I— [*He*

is thinking only of her attitude, but she purposely misunderstands.]

MARION [*sweetly*]. Don't apologize for her coming out safely, Howard. You know I wouldn't have minded—[*with involuntary intensity*—if she had broken her neck.

STANTON [*shocked and angry*]. That is not a womanly speech.

MARION. Oh, yes, it is. You just don't know.

[STANTON *turns from her angrily. When his back is turned she makes an involuntary move and affectionate gesture toward him, while her face shows pain and love. She must show to the audience by her silent acting then that she really loves him and her lightness and humorous taking of the situation is a brave bluff to hide her real deep feeling.*]

STANTON [*turning back, bitterly; moving to right*]. I might have known that would be how you would take it. Ever since you went in for this society thing all you can do is laugh and sneer at everything.

MARION [*with womanly dignity*]. Do you wish me to take the situation seriously, Howard?

STANTON. Isn't it serious?

MARION. I should hate to be forced to take it so.

STANTON. I might have been killed.

MARION [*getting back her poise, rising*]. Oh, Howard, you couldn't have done anything so ungentlemanly.

STANTON [*in amazement*]. Ungentlemanly?

MARION [*rises*]. Yes—the lady—might have a husband or a father—or children or—— [*Contemptuously*.] Oh, any of the relations that women of that sort usually have. Think how you might have compromised her. [*He is too angry to speak and merely stares at her. Goes to him, right.*] Now, my dear Howard, you must promise if you insist upon getting yourself into these absurd scrapes you won't allow yourself to be killed.

STANTON [*sarcastically*]. I'll promise you that. [*Goes to fireplace.*]

MARION [*sweetly*]. Thank you, dear! [*Reflectively*.] One thing I've always liked about you is that you are naturally so obliging in little things. Now, another man might say, yes, he would kill himself if he wanted to, but you are not that way. You have the right idea of how to hold a woman—make her all the little promises that you mean to keep.

STANTON [*contemptuously*]. I suppose you would have been seriously annoyed if I had been killed?

MARION. Indeed I should, Howard dear. You know how insignificant I look in black, and as ours was a love match I should have to wear it for the limit. [*Pause.*]

STANTON [*at bookcase near 'phone; moves over to mantel. Indifferently.*] Well, I suppose this ends it.

MARION [*in slightly strained voice*]. What ends what?

STANTON [*more indifferently*]. What I've been doing—this—— [*Pause for a word.*]

MARION [*sweetly*]. Disgracing yourself and your family?

STANTON. Disgracing! [*Turning sharply, strikes injured arm. With pain.*] Oh!

MARION [*with sudden sympathy*]. My poor boy. [*Turns to him where he stands holding his arm in pain.*] Does it hurt much? [*Draws him over to sofa, makes him sit down.*] You've slipped the bandage—— [*Takes his arm out of sling.*]

STANTON [*sits on sofa right, alongside MARION*]. It isn't anything.

MARION. Does it hurt much? [*She is busy with the bandage.*]

STANTON. Oh, it's not nearly so bad as the last time.

MARION [*in queer voice*]. You remember the last time, then?

STANTON. Sure. It was—— [*Stops short, embarrassed.*]

MARION. Our honeymoon in the Berkshires. [*They look at each other silently for several seconds, then both smile.*] How absurd.

STANTON. Do you remember that evening?

MARION [*softly*]. Yes.

STANTON. The turn in the road just at the elbow of that steep hill——

MARION. We got by the first turn safely. Don't you remember it was the second turn? Remember?

STANTON. Yes—so it was, to be sure. It was the second turn. I'll never forget it.

MARION [*as though trying to recall*]. What were we doing?

STANTON. Why, Marion—you must remember that.

MARION [*shaking her head*]. It's very indistinct.

STANTON. You know. We came flying down that hill, taking the turn on two wheels, and the wind in our faces, and the glory of the evening sun on your hair, and we were laughing, laughing with the joy of being alive, being together, being alone,

and then I forgot everything and leaned toward you——

MARION. And then that sinking-away feeling—the crash and the darkness——

STANTON. And when I came to——

MARION. I came to first, you remember.

STANTON. So you did. When I came to—my head was in your lap and you were cuddling and nursing me——

MARION. Of course I was. Why, you saved my life. I would have been killed if you had not jerked me so that I fell on you and broke your arm.

STANTON. That was the first time you ever sat on me.

MARION. We had not been married long, then, you know.

STANTON. And do you remember that walk afterward? Two miles in the moonlight and you holding my broken arm?

MARION. What a rough place it was.

STANTON. Gee! you were good to me.

MARION. How absurd.

STANTON. What a start that was for a honeymoon. A big smash-up at the outset.

MARION. That wasn't my fault. You did it.

STANTON. Did it nothing! If you hadn't looked so good I wouldn't have leaned toward you.

MARION. I suppose you have the leaning habit in automobiles, Howard.

STANTON. Can you beat it? Whenever anything important happens I always hurt my arm. First the honeymoon, and now d——

[MARION rises abruptly and goes up stage right. Pause.]

STANTON. Marion, I wonder why we can't get on? I thought we used to be so congenial.

MARION [*comes down to left of sofa*]. No, Howard, you pretended to like what I did.

STANTON [*rises*]. No, indeed, you were the one who pretended. But, oh, Marion, that society game I never could stand for.

MARION [*centre*]. Poor boy, how selfish I was.

STANTON [*right*]. You selfish? The idea! I——

MARION. I should have taken more interest—in sport, but racing was always tiresome for me and late suppers always gave me a headache.

STANTON. No, indeed. I was a brute!

MARION. You were not, Howard.

STANTON. Yes, I was.

MARION. No, you weren't. Other things—perhaps, but never——

STANTON [*crossing, with heat*]. Confound it! That's the way: you never will agree with me about anything. Let me be a brute, if I want to be. I'm a brute and I'm going to be a brute.

MARION. Well, perhaps you are right, dear, perhaps you are.

STANTON [*goes up to centre*]. You'll be well rid of me—— [*Pause.*] I suppose you'll marry again?

MARION. Do you——

STANTON [*coming down to right of sofa*]. Whitney's a jolly nice fellow.

MARION [*moves to centre*]. Now look here, Howard. [*Catches herself, laughs.*] We are still married, Howard, and—I—haven't asked any questions about your future.

STANTON [*rises*]. I beg your pardon.

MARION [*crossing to left*]. Don't mention it. [*Pause.*]

STANTON. I'm going to do the right thing. I haven't acted right, I know. I'll do everything to atone by helping you rid yourself of me. I'll give you all the names.

MARION [*centre*]. I know they will appreciate that——

STANTON. Why must you always be so sarcastic?

MARION [*centre*]. I thought there was but *one* woman in that car?

STANTON [*shortly*]. She does not count.

MARION. She will count if there is a divorce and it will be tried publicly.

STANTON. Marion!

MARION. Pray, why should we make an exception in her case?

STANTON. She is a lady.

[MARION *laughs contemptuously.*]

I said she was a lady. [*Moves to left.*]

MARION. Doubtless——

STANTON. I tell you——

MARION. No—I will tell you something: I've known for a long time that you have not been acting entirely as you should, but it has not really troubled me perhaps as much as it ought. But I have never done one of these women the honor to be jealous. This one seems different. You say she belongs to your own station in life as well as your own class in morals. Very well. If there is a divorce, it will be tried publicly and she shall stand with you—disgraced.

STANTON. Marion! She is innocent!

MARION [*defiantly*]. She shall prove it.

[*The bell rings.*]

STANTON. I wonder who on earth that is.

MARION [*indifferent again*]. Another reporter probably.

STANTON. God forbid!

Enter WILSON centre.

WILSON. Mr. Robert Livingstone.

BOB LIVINGSTONE *enters centre.*

MARION. Hello, Bobby!

STANTON. Hello, Bobby!

[*WILSON exits.*]

BOB [*coming down quickly*]. Hello, Marion!
[*Puts arm about her.*] Glad to see you've got your nerve with you. I came as soon as I saw the paper.
[*Turns on STANTON, his arm still about MARION.*]
Well, you're a nice piece of work.

STANTON [*angrily*]. What do you mean?

BOB. Mean? I mean for two cents I'd knock your brains out.

STANTON. What! You? [*Steps toward BOB.*]

BOB. Yes, me!

MARION. Bobby! Bobby! Aren't you ashamed of yourself? Howard hasn't a bit more brains than he needs—hardly that.

BOB. How dare you humiliate my sister?

MARION [*quickly*]. I'm not humiliated!

STANTON. You see she's not humiliated.

BOB [*turning on MARION*]. Well, what are you, then?

MARION. I'm—I'm sorry for Howard.

BOB [*amazed*]. Sorry for him? Well!

STANTON. I don't want your pity, Marion.

MARION. My dear Howard, you ought to be glad to have anything.

BOB. I wouldn't give him anything—not pity, at least.

MARION. But I can't help it, Bob. Think of the fix the poor fellow is in.

BOB. Think of your fix! He has shamed you before the world.

MARION. Well, he broke *her* leg. At least, that's what Mr. Lynch, the reporter, said.

BOB. Lynch? I know that fellow. He's outside. Tried to make me talk just now. I told him we were all coming here to sit on the case—put Stanton on trial at a family conference.

STANTON. What! You? Great heavens!

MARION. I just felt in my bones I was right to pity you, Howard.

BOB [*outraged*]. Marion, you are encouraging him!

MARION. Don't you think he needs it?

BOB. But——

STANTON. Oh, I say, Marion, I'm not going to be made a monkey of.

MARION. Was it I who made the monkey of you, dear? [*To BOB.*] Think of the poor boy's predicament! Besieged in the house by reporters, shut up here with an abusive wife and two belligerent brothers-in-law, and more coming. And all the while she is lying up with a broken leg. I'm sure she's three quarters dead, for she hasn't even telephoned.

WILSON [*at centre*]. A lady on the upstairs 'phone, sir.

[*For an instant the three stand like statues.*

MARION *is cut to the quick.* BOBBY *does not know whether or not to go over and punch STANTON's head.*]

STANTON. A—a—lady?

WILSON. Yes, sir; she wouldn't give her name, sir.

STANTON. Yes—yes—I understand.

WILSON. She said you would, sir.

STANTON. I'm not at home.

WILSON. Very good, sir. [*Starts to exit.*]

MARION. Wait, Wilson.

WILSON [*pauses undecidedly*]. Yes, ma'am.

MARION. Wait outside. [*WILSON exits.*]

Goodness gracious, Howard! You can't say that. She'll think you're in jail. No, I insist on your speaking to her. [*With mocking appeal.*] Have you no pity? Think of her standing at the telephone—waiting on one leg.

STANTON. Well—well—I'll talk to her.

[*Exits centre.*]

MARION. That's right, dear. Do your duty. Now, Bob, you stop bullying my husband. [*'Phone rings. MARION rushes to 'phone right.*] Hello! [*To BOB.*] They've switched her down here. [*Seizes 'phone and works switch such as are used in houses with upstairs and downstairs connection. In honeyed tones.*] Hello! This is Mr. Stanton's residence. [*Pause.*] No, no! Not Mrs. Stanton—no—oh, no, she never speaks to Mr. Stanton's women friends. [*Pause.*] Not even over the 'phone. Who is it then? Oh—oh—Mr. Stanton's secretary. [*Covers*

'phone. To BOB.] Cat! I can just smell the peroxide. [Into 'phone.] How is Mr. Stanton? Oh, he's very anxious to know whether or not you have a broken leg. Why, the reporters said you had. I'm sure I couldn't tell you how the reporters know. Don't you know? [Pause.] Well, he was a very nice looking reporter. I beg your pardon, Miss—or Madam—oh, a miss! I did not mean to be impertinent. [Pause.] Oh, Mr. Stanton? Oh, he's doing quite as well as could be expected under the circumstances. [Pause.] Yes, indeed, I'll do my very best to make him recover. You can count on that. [Pause.] Anything you can do? Well, if it wouldn't be too much trouble couldn't you just send for the reporters and have them come around in front of your house so we could get in and out without having our pictures taken? I'm so sorry. I'm always saying the wrong thing.

[STANTON enters hurriedly, evidently upset; stops aghast on seeing MARION at the 'phone.]

MARION. Oh, here's Mr. Stanton now. Just wait—he'll speak to you. [Puts hand over 'phone; turns to STANTON; very sweetly.] There was some sort of a mix-up, and she was switched down here. I was just holding her for you, dear.

STANTON. Marion, hang that up! I—I—don't—

MARION. No, no, dear, you can't be so rude! Be a nice boy. Talk to the lady. [*Into 'phone.*] Here he is. [*Motions imperiously.*]

STANTON [*comes over as one dazed and takes 'phone. Into 'phone.*] Er—hello! [*Pause.*] I'm all right. [*Embarrassed.*] I'm very glad—yes—yes—er-r-r—she's here.

MARION. Yes, I'm here.

STANTON [*puzzled.*] My secretary!

MARION. Yes, dear, I'm your secretary. I couldn't bear to embarrass a lady with a broken leg.

STANTON. Oh! [*Pause.*] Discharge her!

MARION [*to BOB.*] Well, the two-faced creature!

STANTON. I'm very, very busy.

MARION. Yes, he's very, very busy.

STANTON [*desperately.*] Mrs. Stanton is here.

MARION [*to STANTON.*] You selfish pig.

STANTON. I'll speak with you later.

MARION. Yes, we'll speak with you later.

STANTON. Of course! Of course!

MARION. Oh, of course he does!

STANTON [*hangs up 'phone, turns on* MARION.

Speaks angrily]. I'm ashamed—outraged! How dared you do that?

MARION. Didn't you wish me to speak with her? I thought I was doing you a favor.

STANTON. Look here—

BOB [*confronting STANTON*]. Don't you dare use that tone to my sister—you—you—swine!

STANTON. You—you—I'll— [*Realizing hopelessly the idiocy of his position, flings himself off right.*]

MARION [*to BOB*]. How dare you call my husband a pig?

BOB. Well, if he isn't a pig, what is he?

MARION [*with dignity*]. He's a goose!

BOB. I don't care a damn if he's the whole Noah's ark. You've got to leave here.

MARION. Indeed! Because you say so? You're a pretty one to talk moral platitudes, Mr. Bobby Livingstone, bridegroom! It would do well for you to remember when you begin throwing bricks at other men's glass houses that you have a pretty neat little conservatory of your own.

BOB [*bluffing*]. Pooh! Pooh! What?

MARION. Yes, pooh pooh what? Apparently you have forgotten that dashing lady at Palm Beach

last winter, who ensnared little Bobby's heart and sister Marion had to advise him how to get out when he got engaged to pretty Salie.

BOB [*loftily*]. That's all past. I've forgotten all about that.

MARION. I suppose you've forgotten even her name.

BOB. Er——

MARION. Oh, don't trouble to recall it. I remember it perfectly. By the way, what became of the lady?

BOB. Well, if you won't tell, I introduced her to Ned Morris. He was going about a bit with her, and a couple of months ago I saw her at the theatre with Oliver Whitney.

MARION. You introduced her to Salie?

BOB. I was taken ill and Salie came home with me at the end of the first act.

MARION. You wretch!

BOB. Well——

MARION. Well, if you wish to keep Salie content, you stop trying to bully my husband, or you'll find yourself in his fix.

STANTON *reënters right*.

I've been talking to Bobby, Howard. He's sorry he called you names.

STANTON. Oh, that's all right. I am—— [*Bell rings.*]

BOB. There come the rest. Me to hide.

[Goes off right.]

[MRS. LIVINGSTONE, followed by MRS. BOB LIVINGSTONE, enters centre. MRS. LIVINGSTONE agitated; MRS. BOB, who followed, comes on like a ruffled canary, but also is decidedly important. MRS. LIVINGSTONE is a woman in her late fifties, evidently of good birth and breeding; she still retains a sort of faded prettiness. While she has dignity and poise, she is a woman who has been loved and bullied and managed all her life. In everything but pride of birth and knowledge of her own station she has depended upon stronger wills for opinion. She has a tremendous admiration and a deep affection for her daughter MARION. MRS. BOB (SALIE) is a canary sort of girl, small, plump, blond. She is obviously a bride and the type that an old man or a very young man marries. She is selfish but loving, and is quite sure that

she knows more about marriage and how to manage a husband than all the other women in the world ever learned. She is dressed in the height of fashion and looks absurdly young.]

MARION [*goes to centre to greet MRS. LIVINGSTONE. STANTON goes left. Surprised*]. Hello, mother dear!

MRS. LIVINGSTONE. My dear child. [*Embraces MARION affectionately, almost convulsively.*]

STANTON [*left*]. Good Lord!

[*SALIE is looking HOWARD up and down very much like an indignant canary. Finally turns her back on him.*]

MARION [*releasing herself*]. You see Howard, mother——

MRS. LIVINGSTONE [*very coldly; moving to sofa right and sits*]. Good-morning, Mr. Stanton.

STANTON. Good-morning.

[*MARION kisses SALIE, who responds effusively, then barely bows to STANTON.*]

MARION [*goes to chair right and puts cloak on it and comes down to sofa, sitting on arm*]. Hello, Salie! I was just going over to see you. Howard and I have been terribly lonely.

[*SALIE [centre]. You seem to have plenty of friends*

outside. Goodness knows they were anxious enough. One of them took my picture without even waiting for me to turn the right side of my face. I know it will be horrid.

MRS. LIVINGSTONE. They were most impertinent! One of them asked me what I thought of—how—of Mr. Stanton.

SALIE. As though she could tell them.

STANTON [*moves to exit door up right*]. I have a good deal to do this morning—if you will excuse me.

MRS. LIVINGSTONE [*frigidly*]. Certainly.

SALIE. We will.

[STANTON *exits upper stage right. They all watch him without speaking.*]

SALIE [*turns to MARION*]. Oh, Marion, isn't it terrible?

MARION [*to MRS. LIVINGSTONE, amused*]. What has happened to our little bride, mother? Has Bob done anything?

MRS. LIVINGSTONE [*half tearfully*]. Marion, how can you joke?

MARION. I'm not joking, mother. What is wrong?

MRS. LIVINGSTONE [*in despair and disgust*]. Marion!

SALIE. Wrong? Well, if you don't call this wrong—— [*Begins hauling up her very tight-fitting skirt, displays underneath a copy of the Journal pinned to her petticoat.*]

MARION. Salie!

[*SALIE, unpinning paper, offers it to MARION so that audience can see across the front page in big, black type the headline "Scandal." Takes paper, glances at it, represses an expression of disgust, throws it on table indifferently. Blandly.*]

Well, dear, I am relieved. I've been wondering what that was ever since you came in.

SALIE [*complacently*]. Yes—even a piece of paper under these new skirts does look like a physical deformity. But I was determined, dear, you should see it. I thought it my duty as one married woman to another. And of course I couldn't be seen carrying the sheet.

MARION. It was sweet and thoughtful of you, dear.

SALIE [*gets chair from over near sofa and puts it centre, sitting*]. I must say, Marion—I don't want to criticise you, understand—but I must say that I think if you had managed Howard a little more

firmly this scandal would not have occurred. We wives must take a firm stand. The whole future of the country depends upon us—and we should appreciate the responsibility. I know I do.

MARION. I'm quite sure you do, dear.

SALIE. Yes—I've spoken very seriously to Bobby. We will never have anything like this in our family. There will be no opportunity. [*Produces from her purse a little black notebook.*] See, I have a book. He has a book. [*With great seriousness.*] Every night I check him up and if he cannot account for every minute I don't let him even kiss me. Now, why don't you try that with Howard?

MARION [*the strain is beginning to tell on her. She laughs grimly*]. Perhaps some night I might want him to kiss me.

MRS. LIVINGSTONE [*horrified*]. Oh, Marion!

MARION. Well, mother, is there anything so disreputable in a married woman wishing her husband to kiss her? I'm sure Salie approves.

MRS. LIVINGSTONE. Salie has been married one month.

SALIE. I don't suppose it is proper just on the eve of divorce. Speaking of divorce, Marion——

MARION. Why speak of it, dear?

SALIE. Not that I want you to get a divorce—but if you should, you know, you would not wish this lovely house to go out of the family, and Bob and I—

MRS. LIVINGSTONE [*rises*]. Salie— [*All rise.*]

MARION [*rising; seeing the funny side but almost too far gone to laugh at it*]. Salie, dear, won't you run away and tell Howard your ideas? I am sure he will appreciate them.

[*MRS. LIVINGSTONE moves to library table.*]

SALIE [*getting up quickly*]. Of course.

[*With determination, MARION takes chair and places it where it stood originally and sits upon it.*]

I'll talk to him.

[*Goes upper stage right. Exits up right.* MRS.

LIVINGSTONE *moves to left.*]

MARION [*calling after her*]. Don't bully him!

MRS. LIVINGSTONE [*centre, looking after SALIE*]. Well, I cannot for the life of me understand what your brother Robert ever saw in that girl.

MARION [*absently*]. They will be happy, I suppose.

MRS. LIVINGSTONE [*rather querulously*]. Yes—I suppose so. One never can tell who will be happy

and who will not. Now, I thought you——[*Both sit at left.*]

MARION [*overwrought*]. Mother! Don't!

MRS. LIVINGSTONE [*goes toward MARION, her real mother nature roused*]. Can't you tell your mother all about it, dear?

[*MARION drops on footstool beside sofa, bends over and buries her face in her mother's lap. MRS. LIVINGSTONE strokes her hair tenderly.*]

MARION. It is partly my fault, I suppose. I did not take as much interest as I should in things that amused Howard. [*Rises and sits on sofa.*]

MRS. LIVINGSTONE. I should hope not.

MARION. I did—I did go in for society a good deal——

MRS. LIVINGSTONE. Of course.

MARION. He did not realize it was because I was lonesome. [*Plaintively.*] Sometimes, mother, I think that men are awful fools.

MRS. LIVINGSTONE [*with conviction*]. They are almost always. But that doesn't excuse—Howard Stanton—[*goes to sofa and sits alongside of MARION*]—bringing about such a scandal. Now we will have all the horrible notoriety of a divorce suit——

MARION. Divorce suit! Oh, no, put that idea out of your head.

MRS. LIVINGSTONE. But—what can you do? You can't live with him after this scandal—consider your own dignity! It's scarcely proper. Why, when I came this morning I hardly expected to find you here——

MARION. Where did you expect to find me? Out in the street talking to the reporters?

MRS. LIVINGSTONE. Marion!

MARION. Mother, dear, it's time to end this hypocrisy that is merely a confession of weakness. It's time, I tell you, for the good women to wake up. We fight to get our husbands. Why not fight to hold them? We good women are too fond of sitting still and pretending to be coldly superior while our hearts break as the other women steal our husbands. Well, I'm not going to be like that—not much. If she gets my husband she'll earn him.

MRS. LIVINGSTONE. Marion, you always did have impossible ideas.

MARION. Impossible? I'll show you.

MRS. LIVINGSTONE. What are you going to do?
[*Makes inquiring gesture.*]

MARION. Never mind now, mother; just curb that curiosity. I have a plan. You wait and see——

MRS. LIVINGSTONE. Well, all I can say is I wish you had married Oliver Whitney!

MARION. But I didn't love Oliver Whitney—I loved Howard. I do love Howard.

MRS. LIVINGSTONE. Marion, if you are *not* crazy, you ought to be. I don't know where you get such impossible ideas; certainly not from my side of the family.

[*Bell rings. Enter WILSON. MRS. LIVINGSTONE rises and moves to left.*]

MRS. LIVINGSTONE. That is probably your father.

WILSON [*at door centre*]. Mrs. Stanton!

[*MRS. STANTON enters. She is a rather large, heavy, and exceedingly dignified and overbearing woman. She has been spoiled by having too much money. Her redeeming trait is her intense love for her son HOWARD. She is not so fine fibred as MRS. LIVINGSTONE and MARION.*]

MARION. Good-morning. It was sweet of you to come so early. [*Goes to MRS. STANTON expecting*

but evidently not willing to be kissed, but MRS. STANTON merely shakes hands.]

MRS. STANTON. I would have been here two hours ago but for the intolerable insolence of the police. Coming in from Morristown they arrested us twice for speeding. And when the magistrate learned whose car it was, he said, "Oh, Howard Stanton's mother!" then doubled the fine, besides being most impertinent. [*Comes down right centre with MARION, who stands above MRS. LIVINGSTONE, who has seated herself in armchair left.*]

MRS. LIVINGSTONE [*rising*]. Good-morning, Mrs. Stanton.

MRS. STANTON [*goes to chair right with equal coldness*]. Good-morning, Mrs. Livingstone.

[*They sit down, MRS. STANTON at right end of sofa, MRS. LIVINGSTONE in chair right of centre table. The two ladies eye each other coldly each evidently questioning the right of the other to be there. MARION stands a bit back and between the two.*]

MRS. LIVINGSTONE [*sweetly*]. With the example of your son's accident, you were very brave to come so fast.

MRS. STANTON [*icily*]. I was not coming fast.

A bare forty-mile rate. I don't understand why some gentlemen don't become judges so we might have a little justice and courtesy in the courts. The idea of delaying a mother on her way to visit her injured son!

MARION. It will be a great pleasure to Howard and me having our two mothers with us. You must both stay to lunch.

MRS. LIVINGSTONE [*coldly*]. Thank you, dear.

MARION [*going up*]. I'll run away and fetch Howard—if you two will amuse each other.

[*Exits right.*]

MRS. STANTON. That will be very nice.

[*The two mothers sit bolt upright, facing audience for several seconds, neither speaking. Both cough significantly, each thinking the other is about to speak.*]

MRS. LIVINGSTONE. I beg your pardon. You were saying—

MRS. STANTON. I was not saying anything.

MRS. LIVINGSTONE. It's a charming day—so bright and cheerful.

MRS. STANTON. Did those newspaper ruffians insult you?

MRS. LIVINGSTONE. They were most impertinent. They took my picture.

MRS. STANTON. They wouldn't dare to do that to me.

MRS. LIVINGSTONE. No, I don't think they would. [*Pause.*]

MRS. STANTON. Well, it certainly was not my son's desire to get into the papers.

MRS. LIVINGSTONE. Do you mean to insinuate it was my daughter's?

MRS. STANTON. A young man of position must have his amusements provided he lives within his income.

MRS. LIVINGSTONE. I think he should always remember his position and not humiliate his wife. Fortunately, my daughter has her own income, a wedding present from her father.

MRS. STANTON. I trust my son maintains his own establishment.

MRS. LIVINGSTONE. That is exactly the trouble—he maintains too many.

MRS. STANTON. Has Mrs. Howard Stanton complained?

MRS. LIVINGSTONE. The Livingstone women have a pride of birth which prevents complaining.

MRS. STANTON. Oh! The Stanton men never permit outside interference in their family affairs.

MRS. LIVINGSTONE. Fortunately the courts provide a remedy.

MRS. STANTON. Most fortunately.

MRS. LIVINGSTONE [*with a short catch in her voice*]. Of course there must be this unavoidable disgrace of an old and honored name dragged through the mire of a divorce court.

MRS. STANTON [*beginning to sniff also*]. Divorce! Oh, they should think of their parents. If Mr. Stanton were alive!

MRS. LIVINGSTONE. General Livingstone will take some action.

MRS. STANTON [*with determination*]. I think they ought to be spanked.

[HOWARD STANTON and MARION enter together upper stage right. At the same instant the bell rings. MRS. STANTON rises, all other feelings drowned in mother love at sight of her son so bandaged.]

My—my dear boy!

STANTON [*coming down to right of sofa*]. Mother, I'm glad to see you. [*Comes down to meet her.*]

[MRS. LIVINGSTONE seated left. MARION goes

over beside her. SALIE enters and moves to right above settee right.]

MRS. STANTON. My boy! [*Tries to take him in her arms as though he were a child.*]

[*MORRIS enters centre. He remains close to STANTON and his mother, while SALIE moves to MRS. LIVINGSTONE and MARION, so that the families are lined up on either side of centre table.*]

STANTON. Now, now, mother. There is nothing the matter. I'm all right.

SALIE [*to MARION*]. He was horrid. Practically told me to mind my own business.

MARION [*sweetly*]. Why didn't you, dear?

SALIE. Oh!

WILSON [*centre*]. General Livingstone!

[*STANTON is still standing with his arm about his mother and her arm around his shoulders when GENERAL LIVINGSTONE appears centre. GENERAL LIVINGSTONE is a man of sixty-five, tall, straight, imposing, with white hair and short-cropped white moustache; a gentleman of the old school. He carries a copy of the Journal in his hand.*]

MARION. Dad! [*Hurries to him.*]

GENERAL LIVINGSTONE [*centre, taking her in his arms*]. Marion, my little girl. [*Kisses her.*]

MARION [*taking the paper from him*]. Oh, dad, did you bring another of those horrible things into this house? [*Opens paper, reads headline.*] "Family Conference!" How absurd. Here, mother, read this and cheer up. [*Throws paper aside.*]

GENERAL LIVINGSTONE. Marion, I have come to take you home.

MARION [*with simple dignity*]. I am at home, father.

STANTON. This is Marion's home, General.

GENERAL LIVINGSTONE. I am Marion's father, and I do not recognize your right to decide this matter.

STANTON [*going to him*]. I am Marion's husband, and whether you recognize it or not, I have the right.

MARION [*moving between them. She is smiling pleasantly but in her voice there is a ring of determination*]. And they both guessed wrong the very first time. [*Becoming serious.*] Father, Howard, you are both dear and you are both acting exactly as you should. But, dear men, that day when you grandly decided and women meekly submitted has gone by. Father, I owe you respect; I owe Howard allegiance,

as long as he deserves it. But no one can decide for me anything that is going to affect my whole life. I will decide it myself for myself, when and how I please. For the present——

[WILSON *appears at centre door.* MARION *sees him, her face lights.*]

My decision is that we all go to lunch. Ned, will you take mother? Father—take Mrs. Stanton.

[SALIE *goes first and alone.* MORRIS *moves to MRS. LIVINGSTONE and both exit.* GENERAL LIVINGSTONE *moves to MRS. STANTON and both exit.* *The others all file out dazed, as she directs.*]

One moment—Howard——

[STANTON *pauses.*]

STANTON [*after pause*]. Well—what are you going to do? I will abide by your decision.

MARION. Who is she?

STANTON. I told you—she is innocent of any wrong.

MARION. I promise you not to use her name if I sue——

STANTON [*doubtfully*]. Oh——

MARION. Now, who is she?

STANTON [*rather ashamed*]. Mrs. Blakemore.

MARION. Mrs.—the rich widow from the South?

STANTON. Yes.

MARION. Do you love her?

[STANTON *does not answer*. MARION *repeats distinctly*.]

Do you?

STANTON [*with sudden determination*]. Hang it, Marion, you've been frank with me—I'm damned if I know. [*Goes left*.]

MARION. See here, Howard! A man goes to the woman who offers the most to his nature. I am a woman. She is a woman. If I cannot hold you against all other women I don't want you. I'll invite Mrs. Blakemore here and put it to the test.

STANTON [*amazed and shocked*]. Marion!

MARION [*triumphantly*]. That is my decision.

[*Both walk toward centre. Exit as curtain falls*.]

Curtain.

[MUSIC CUE: "That Is My Decision." *Lauder's "She Is My Daisy."*]

ACT II

ACT II

SCENE: *Same as Act I, except that the room is brilliantly lighted and evidently prepared for company.*

TIME: *Thursday evening in the week following the events of Act I. It is before dinner.*

DISCOVERED: *At the rise WILSON is on the stage fixing curtains left. He fixes curtains, then crosses to right and begins fooling about fireplace. STANTON enters centre. He is in evening clothes, but somewhat disarranged, as though he had dressed hurriedly. He is plainly very much irritated.*

STANTON [*sharply*]. What are you doing?

WILSON. Nothing, sir.

STANTON. Well, go and do something.

WILSON. Yes, sir. I will, sir. [*Redoubles business about the fireplace.*]

STANTON [*irritably*]. Oh, that's enough of that.

WILSON. Yes, sir.

[*MARION enters. She is dressed for the evening in a simply made but very handsome gown*

which fits her splendidly and is calculated to impress by its simplicity and dignity.]

MARION [*she is evidently under a nervous strain, but is more self-controlled than STANTON*]. Dressed?

STANTON [*at table, sharply*]. Yes.

[MARION *looks him over, notices his disarranged appearance with uplifted eyebrows; turns to WILSON.*]

MARION [*right*]. I want everything to look particularly nice to-night, Wilson.

WILSON. Yes, Mrs. Stanton. [*Continues business about fireplace.*]

MARION [*impatiently*]. No, no, Wilson, that won't do at all. [*Comes down, moves tongs about half an inch, steps back, surveys what she has done with satisfaction.*] There! That's much better. [*Takes ornament from mantel, holds it a moment, puts it back in almost the same place.*] Mrs. Blakemore is dark, isn't she?

STANTON. Yes.

MARION. Move out that blue-green fire shield, Wilson. Dark women so love a blue-green background. [*Looks about the room, then to herself half aloud, while WILSON moves out the fire shield.*] That will do, Wilson. You may go.

[WILSON *exits*. MARION *gives a sigh of relief and satisfaction as she looks about the room.*]

I think everything looks very nice.

STANTON [*he has been fidgeting about impatiently, scarcely able to control himself until WILSON should leave the room; now breaks out angrily*]. Look here, Marion, what the thunder is this you think you're pulling off?

MARION [*moves about room. Sweetly*]. "Pulling off?" A dinner, Howard, to your friend Mrs. Blake-more.

STANTON. Well, I don't approve of it.

MARION. Why? Is Mrs. Blakemore some one I absolutely should not meet?

STANTON [*hedging*]. Of course not. But the circumstance—everything—

MARION [*sweetly*]. We've discussed that, Howard. I'm doing you a favor.

STANTON [*dumbfounded*]. Favor?

MARION [*smiles, nods*]. Yes. It isn't every wife would introduce her successor, and you know she really ought to meet the family. Don't you think it is so much nicer to have her properly introduced?

STANTON [*gasps, looks at her in amazement, then*

uncertainly]. Well, I don't approve. Can't you see it's going to be an awful mess?

MARION. Why? [*Half laughing.*] Won't you be able to conceal your affection?

STANTON [*blurting angrily*]. Well, I'm not going to be made any one-ring circus of.

MARION. Oh, Howard! It isn't a cheap show. Three rings at least.

STANTON. Look here, I'm not going to have her brought here for the amusement of your family.

MARION. And don't forget yours. [*Left centre. Suddenly tender and sympathetic, almost maternal.*] You poor, dear boy. I don't want to humiliate you. Of course not. I have invited Mrs. Blakemore. I am not going to insult a guest. Now come, you're all mussed up. Where did you dress? Let me fix you. Oh, that tie!

STANTON. What's the matter with it?

[MARION *comes over, begins fixing his tie, STANTON submitting awkwardly, unwillingly.*]

MARION [*as she works over tie*]. Don't fidget so. Honestly, Howard, you act like a rebellious child having his face washed for Sunday-school. I must have you looking your best. There'd be no real

self-sacrifice in giving another woman a chance if you didn't look well, you know. [*Fools with his collar.*]

STANTON [*half choked*]. Don't! You're choking me.

MARION. Must! Be terrible, wouldn't it, if she decided she didn't want you after all this trouble? And how humiliating for me. [*Redoubles efforts to make him look nice. With determination.*] Oh, you must look your best. [*Steps back.*] There! That's better. [*Comes to left as she turns him around. Looking him over judicially.*] Turn around. [*Presses out the shoulders of his coat and smooths his hair with affectionate, almost maternal, gesture. Her manner and expression when he is not looking directly at her show sincere feeling and deep love.*] Now you look good enough for any woman—to give away.

STANTON [*has submitted in half-embarrassed, angry way to MARION'S caressing*]. It's awful good of you to take so much trouble. Never could tie one of the fool things.

MARION. That's how I learned.

STANTON [*the meaning not striking him*]. That's so! [*Face lighting.*] I remember the first time you learned.

MARION [*assumed indifference*]. Um—don't recall exactly.

STANTON [*disappointed that she has forgotten*]. You remember one night your father coming into the room and it had to be tied quick.

MARION [*casually*]. Oh, I'd learned long before then. I used to tie Oliver Whitney's.

STANTON [*angrily*]. What?

MARION. Besides, Howard Stanton, I did not kiss you.

STANTON. I know you didn't. That's how it came untied. You dodged.

MARION. Well—widows don't dodge.

STANTON [*takes the dig and tries to retaliate*]. You didn't always dodge. [*Nods with satisfaction.*]

MARION. Humph! Well, I'm safe now. [*Stands before him in a particularly alluring position, looking at him daringly, teasingly. STANTON, being a man, makes an involuntary move toward her, holding out his hands. She steps back, smiling in teasing fashion and warding off his outstretched hands in pretended horror.*] Remember who's coming. What would Mrs. Blakemore say? At least be faithful to your last love. Stay put!

STANTON [*stops suddenly, and laughs in spite of himself*]. Hang it, Marion. I almost forgot.

MARION. You're always forgetting. Remember the night you kissed me in the automobile and forgot it was lighted?

STANTON. And you slapped my face.

MARION. Of course I did. Do you suppose I wanted to be kissed in public like a Luna Park belle on the back of a Coney Island steamboat?

STANTON. Gee! We had good times in that car.

MARION. Yes, indeed. [*Pause.*] You're always having good times in automobiles. Gracious! we're forgetting Mrs. Blakemore.

STANTON. Damn——

MARION. What was that?

STANTON [*angry at the dig*]. Oh—— [*Trying to get away from the subject, looks at his watch.*] They ought to be here by now.

MARION. Oh, I forgot to tell you. I invited Mrs. Blakemore half an hour ahead of the others. It's so much more cozy that way. [*Looks about the room with a hostess' last look before her guests arrive.*] Well, I'm glad it looks nice. Whatever she may think of me, she must admit that I have trained you well for her.

STANTON [*angry and pleading*]. For heaven's sake, Marion——

MARION. This is a dear old room. I quite envy you the fun of fitting it up all over again. Of course you'll have your new crest.

STANTON. Crest?

MARION. Yes. Crossed hearts above an automobile rampant. She'd like that, wouldn't she?

STANTON. Oh, stop it!

MARION. There are a few things, dear, that I would like to take—little souvenirs. That vase, you bought it for me on our honeymoon. It's a tall, hollow vase—it will remind me of you.

STANTON. Marion, have you no sentiment? Think of your past.

MARION. I've no time to think of the past. I must think of the future. Where shall I go to get my divorce—Rhode Island, Sioux Falls, or Reno?

STANTON. Oh, Marion, where is your sense of propriety.

MARION. I don't know, Howard; probably lost it where you lost yours—automobiling. Oh! [*Cut to the quick, draws back sharply just as the bell rings.*] Mrs. Blakemore! Goodness! [*In sudden panic, fumbles with her hair.*] I know I look a fright. I'll—I'll just run away a minute. [*Pauses for final dig.*] You won't really mind—and what would she think

if she caught us alone together! [*Exits up stage right hurriedly, and looking back as STANTON hastily fumbles with his coat, straightens his tie, and begins fixing himself all over again for MRS. BLAKEMORE.*]

WILSON [*at centre door announcing*]. Mrs. Blakemore!

[*MRS. BLAKEMORE enters down left. She is an extremely attractive looking woman in her early thirties, rather large, somewhat voluptuous. Her face, in spite of her ability to be light and charming, shows disillusion, cynicism. She is rather a drifter, without the energetic strength of purpose or the decision necessary for a social climber. She would be capable of tigerish fierceness if sufficiently wounded or aroused, but love of admiration and inertia ordinarily predominates. When she enters, she is evidently keyed up to meet an unusual situation.*]

STANTON [*shaking hands*]. Charming as usual, Mrs. Blakemore. [*In lower key.*] It's great to see you.

[*WILSON, being a perfect butler, knowing all the family secrets, is determined not to miss this meeting. He moves over and begins fumbling*

with the curtains left. STANTON'S and MRS. BLAKEMORE'S scene must be played very intimately.]

MRS. BLAKEMORE [*with lifted eyebrows*]. I fear I am early. Mrs. Stanton——

STANTON [*hastily*]. Mrs. Stanton will be down directly. She—is——

MRS. BLAKEMORE [*lightly*]. Arming for the fray?
[WILSON, at left, lets out an involuntary gasp.]

STANTON [*looking across the room sternly at WILSON*]. That curtain is all right, Wilson.

WILSON. Yes, sir. [*In absolute silence he moves slowly across the room and begins to busy himself over the small fire in fireplace.*]

STANTON [*right centre, irritably*]. There's nothing the matter with that, Wilson.

WILSON. Yes, sir. [*Straightens, looks about the room, trying to find some other excuse for staying.*]

STANTON [*sternly*]. Tell Mrs. Stanton that Mrs. Blakemore has arrived.

WILSON [*with emphasis, showing complete disapproval*]. Yes, sir.

[*Exits slowly in silence, right.*]

MRS. BLAKEMORE [*moves to sofa, right*]. What a perfect servant!

STANTON [*carelessly*]. Yes, excellent.

MRS. BLAKEMORE. Yes, I'll wager he knows every time you say your prayers.

STANTON [*eagerly*]. You do look bully to-night, Puss.

MRS. BLAKEMORE [*drops into sofa, lazily*]. You silly boy! Do you suppose I should have come otherwise? [MRS. BLAKEMORE'S *manner toward STANTON is lazily, sensuously encouraging, no matter what the speech. Pause.*] Do you think Mrs. Stanton will like me, Howard?

STANTON [*embarrassed, gets chair and sits*]. Er—ah—I don't see—

MRS. BLAKEMORE [*seated; reproachfully*]. Where have you been keeping yourself? What have you been doing? One whole week! It isn't altogether fair to make yourself essential, then—pouf! disappear. Besides, I've been dying of curiosity, to say the least.

STANTON [*moves chair, flattered*]. I didn't realize I was so altogether essential.

MRS. BLAKEMORE. Perhaps you're not. [*With a look that means you are.*] It was your wife I wished to know about.

STANTON [*somewhat crestfallen and conscience stricken*]. Oh, my wife. She's all right.

MRS. BLAKEMORE [*reading his mood*]. You do look handsome to-night, Howard. I have always thought you were about the best looking man I ever saw in evening clothes—always immaculate—
[*Pause, looks at him suddenly.*] But that tie!

STANTON. What's the matter with it? [*Fumbles with tie.*]

MRS. BLAKEMORE. No, no. You make it worse—if possible. You do need a woman. Let me!
[*Comes over, begins tying tie.*]

[*WILSON appearing centre, stops, astounded, coughs loudly; MRS. BLAKEMORE and STANTON step apart guiltily.*]

WILSON [*with meaning*]. Mrs. Stanton desires me to say that she will be down at once, sir.

STANTON [*right, holding hand over untied tie*]. Very well, Wilson.

[*Exit WILSON.*]

STANTON [*to MRS. BLAKEMORE*]. Please—quick!
[*MRS. BLAKEMORE hastily reties tie, STANTON with his head twisted, watching the door. With relief.*]
Thanks.

MRS. BLAKEMORE [*right centre, looking him over*]. It takes a woman to really tie a tie. That's splendid!
[*Goes to back of sofa.*] Polly and Jim have missed

you terribly. Poor little fellow. He whines about the house and will hardly eat anything.

STANTON [*moving over to her*]. Good old Jimmie! But you see, I've been ver—very busy lately.

MRS. BLAKEMORE [*tenderly questioning*]. Then the days are not going to be so long for Jimmy and me?

STANTON. I hope not. [*With enthusiasm.*] It's wonderful how congenial you and I are.

MRS. BLAKEMORE [*with sincerity*]. I don't know, Howard. I've met lots of people, but you are the squarest and the best fellow of them all. I think at heart you are on the level. I reckon that's why I like you.

STANTON. We do think the same about most things.

MRS. BLAKEMORE [*warningly*]. Don't forget our one difference.

STANTON [*impatiently*]. Oh!

MRS. BLAKEMORE [*reluctantly, but gently firm*]. So long as you are married, you owe a duty—

STANTON. Oh! [*Makes impatient gesture.*]

MRS. BLAKEMORE [*cautiously*]. There will be an action?

STANTON. I can't let you be involved.

MRS. BLAKEMORE. Some of her friends have seen us together.

STANTON. Yes.

MRS. BLAKEMORE. It must have been a terrific scene. Really, Howard, before this came up, I never properly appreciated your strength of character. I apologize. When that invitation came—*[acting out scene]*—little Elizabeth just put down her coffee cup and said: “Elizabeth, you are flabbergasted. You have cruelly misjudged a remarkable young man.” Honestly, my friend, how under heaven did you ever induce her to invite me?

STANTON *[behind sofa]*. Induce her? I couldn't stop her.

MRS. BLAKEMORE *[startled]*. Then she knows——

STANTON *[back, nods his head with fearful affirmation]*. Yes.

MRS. BLAKEMORE. What! And you let me come without knowing——

STANTON. Yes, yes—yes——

MRS. BLAKEMORE. How dare you do a thing like that?

STANTON. You often asked me to let you come.

MRS. BLAKEMORE. I—asked—well, really I'm not going to be made a one-ring circus of!

STANTON. No, three rings at least. She—you—and I.

MRS. BLAKEMORE. A holy show! Now I want to tell you, Howard Stanton—

MARION *enters*.

MARION [*comes forward smiling as conventional hostess*]. I'm sure this is Mrs. Blakemore. [*With meaning*.]

MRS. BLAKEMORE [*quickly recovering*]. Mrs. Stanton.

MARION. So charming of you to overlook the informality of my invitation and let me presume on your friendship for Mr. Stanton.

MRS. BLAKEMORE. It's really remarkable we have not met before. I am sure we must have interests in common.

MARION. We probably have. [*Sweetly*.] Yes, I have a number of friends in the West now—both Sioux Falls and Reno. Probably you've met them?

MRS. BLAKEMORE [*smiling*]. No. I'm from the South.

MARION. How delightful! We have met at last.

MRS. BLAKEMORE. Yes, indeed. I've looked forward to it.

STANTON [*clumsily, trying to lighten the situation*]. Then we ought all to be pleased.

MARION [*ignoring STANTON'S speech*]. Yes, I wished very much to meet you, for I felt I owed you an apology.

MRS. BLAKEMORE [*astounded*]. Apology! To me?

MARION. Yes, for ever permitting you to go out in that automobile with Mr. Stanton when I knew that tire was weak and how recklessly he drives.

[STANTON *stares at MARION, amazed. MRS. BLAKEMORE is completely nonplussed.*]

STANTON. No—eh—you—you never can tell what will be the result of a trip in an automobile, can you?

MRS. BLAKEMORE [*from the bottom of her heart*]. You never can.

MARION. I think though, Howard, you should have warned Mrs. Blakemore what the result might be. [MARION *moves to left. HOWARD moves to centre.*]

STANTON [*beyond the depth*]. What? I? [Stares helplessly at MARION.]

MRS. BLAKEMORE [*with emphasis that shows very plainly she refers to the present result*]. You should. Why didn't you?

STANTON [*turns helplessly to MRS. BLAKEMORE, then back to MARION, and back again to MRS. BLAKEMORE, staring from one to the other like the victim expecting but not knowing where the next blow will land. Blurts*]. I—how could I know?

MARION [*laughing, to MRS. BLAKEMORE*]. He couldn't. I think we had both better forgive him.

MRS. BLAKEMORE. Well, it's generous.

MARION. Oh, no, not for me. I'm merely standing up for my rights; forgiving is the one prerogative a wife never loses.

STANTON [*somewhat peevish*]. I don't like that speech, Marion. Of course it's a joke, but it doesn't sound exactly right. It sounds as though—as though you had a great deal to forgive.

MARION [*soothingly*]. Oh, I am sure Mrs. Blake-more understands.

MRS. BLAKEMORE [*hastily*]. I think misunderstandings are terrible things. I have found the best way to avoid them is absolute frankness—absolute openness. My friends know just how to take me.

MARION [*with naïve surprise*]. Do they all take

you the same way? If they do I'm sure I know you very well indeed, for Mr. Stanton has talked so much of the charming Mrs. Blakemore.

MRS. BLAKEMORE [*a vibrant hint of anger in her voice, to STANTON*]. Oh, you've been talking about me, have you?

STANTON [*stares from one to the other, helplessly*]. Er—a—oh—yes—yes—sure.

MRS. BLAKEMORE. What did you say?

STANTON [*turning weakly from one to the other*]. What did I say? Oh, I said you were—er—what—er—— [*Imagination fails, he grins fatuously, then with inspiration.*] What do you think I said?

MRS. BLAKEMORE [*feverishly*]. The Lord only knows.

STANTON [*angrily, seeking justification*]. Well, what did I say, Marion?

MARION [*sweetly*]. Well, Howard, you were sufficiently enthusiastic to make me very anxious to meet Mrs. Blakemore.

MRS. BLAKEMORE. You must have received a very graphic picture, Mrs. Stanton. I've always admired Mr. Stanton's powers of description and explanation.

STANTON. Yes—I can explain anything! [Mrs.

BLAKEMORE *transfixes him with a look. He stops, stares, stammers.*] Er—ah——

MRS. BLAKEMORE [*quickly trying to cover STANTON'S embarrassment*]. It was very good of you to invite me, Mrs. Stanton.

MARION [*quickly*]. No, indeed, Mrs. Blakemore. I've always thought it a wife's duty as well as a pleasure to be interested in her husband's close friends.

STANTON. Oh—ah—ah—I knew all along you two would like each other. [*Laughing, embarrassed.*] It rather reverses the old saying, "like me, like my dog." [*Suddenly stops aghast, realizing what he has said.*] No—I mean my dog, like me. [*Stops, more embarrassed than ever.*] No—it's like—like—what is it like?

[*Both women leave him to flounder without help.*]

MRS. BLAKEMORE. It's really charming, Mrs. Stanton, your inviting me—a stranger in a strange land.

MARION. A stranger? How absurd! Why, Howard, I had an idea Mrs. Blakemore was the lady I saw with you six months ago at Sherry's.

STANTON [*dumbfounded*]. What! Six months? You—— No, you did not see me with any lady six months ago!

MARION [*sweetly correcting him*]. Indeed, but I did, dear. Oh, how foolish I am. [*Apologetically.*] I recall now that lady was a blonde. [*Turns to MRS. BLAKEMORE, politely questioning.*] It couldn't have been you?

MRS. BLAKEMORE [*haughtily touching her own head*]. Of course it couldn't.

MARION [*to both generally*]. You know really I have never heard the true story of your automobile accident. I'm so interested. Howard never would tell me. How did it occur?

[MRS. BLAKEMORE and STANTON look blankly in horrified fashion at each other. MARION sits between the two in attitude of strained attention as though she expected thrilling recitals. STANTON and MRS. BLAKEMORE look across at each other in guilty fashion, each motioning to the other to begin. Finally both cough significantly at the same time.]

MRS. BLAKEMORE [*to STANTON*]. Why don't you tell?

[MARION turns to STANTON.]

STANTON. Er—ah—you see—— [*To MRS. BLAKEMORE.*] Oh, you tell it. You know you tell a story much better than I do.

MARION [*turning to* MRS. BLAKEMORE]. Yes, you tell it, Mrs. Blakemore. I'm sure you're a much better story teller than Howard. [*With great sweetness. Pause.*]

MRS. BLAKEMORE [*embarrassed*]. I—I—I've never achieved any great reputation as a story teller.

MARION [*politely unbelieving*]. No—really?

STANTON. Oh, it wasn't anything, Marion.

MRS. BLAKEMORE. Not anything at all, Mrs. Stanton.

MARION. Oh, you are wrong, I know you are. I've never seen such modest people. Here you go through a thrilling adventure that set all New York by the ears and stirred up every newspaper into writing pages, and then you say it isn't anything! Why, I'm ashamed of you! Why, I believe I could tell it myself.

STANTON. Go ahead and tell it then.

MRS. BLAKEMORE. Your version should be interesting, Mrs. Stanton.

MARION [*brightly*]. Let me see. Of course you had dinner, that little roadhouse—you know the one—the first on the left-hand side when you leave New Haven—and you sat at that far-off little table in the corner with the vines around it.

MRS. BLAKEMORE [*surprised*]. How did you know we sat there?

MARION. That's where Howard always sits.

MRS. BLAKEMORE. Indeed!

MARION. And then you started. [*Going into animated description.*] Five miles—six miles, with the speed increasing every second. Now you pass fifty an hour—you reach that long hill.

[*STANTON and MRS. BLAKEMORE are looking blankly at each other, absolutely dumbfounded and overwhelmed with the way MARION is handling the situation.*]

Nothing on the road can hold you! Down—down you go round the first turn on two wheels, you both laughing, laughing with the joy of being alive and being together, and the glory of the evening sun is upon you, and the madness of flying—of living—and then you forget everything, and then Howard leans toward you——

MRS. BLAKEMORE [*startled*]. How do you know he leaned?

MARION. Oh, in automobiles Howard always leans.

STANTON. Marion!

MRS. BLAKEMORE. Oh, you always lean, do you?

MARION. Then came the crash and the darkness. And when you came to—— [*Looks from one to the other.*] Which one came to first?

[MRS. BLAKEMORE and STANTON look guiltily at each other.]

STANTON. Er—I don't remember, Marion.

MRS. BLAKEMORE. I know, I did.

MARION [*clasps her hands*]. Good! I knew you did. I was sure of it. [*Confidential tone.*] You know Howard always comes to his senses last.

MRS. BLAKEMORE. I must really congratulate you, Mrs. Stanton, on your splendid description. It's almost as though you had been there yourself.

MARION [*politely*]. Don't mention it. But I must not take too much credit. When one has a husband with the automobile habit one gets a good general impression you know.

WILSON *enters centre.*

WILSON. Beg pardon, ma'am, but Mr. Morris is on the upstairs 'phone.

STANTON. Morris? Good! [*Rises.*]

MARION. Howard!

STANTON. No, I didn't mean that. I—I've been waiting for that 'phone message for some time. If

you'll excuse me, I'll be back when the others have arrived.

[Both ladies bow acquiescence and STANTON exits centre with ludicrous haste and most evident relief. WILSON exits after STANTON. As soon as he is off there comes a subtle change in the attitude of the two women. They are like two fencers who have felt each other out and are now just coming together for the real fight. Both are determined, both bold, and MRS. BLAKEMORE is the aggressor.]

MRS. BLAKEMORE *[with laugh]*. Now we can have a real chat.

MARION. Yes.

MRS. BLAKEMORE. I think, Mrs. Stanton, you and I should be very good friends. We probably have interests in common.

MARION. We probably have.

[MRS. BLAKEMORE smiles confidentially. She is trying to overrun MARION by her supreme confidence and experience. MARION is nervous, like a novice going into a fight against an old campaigner.]

MRS. BLAKEMORE *[lightly]*. Let us be frank, you and I. Mr. Stanton has told me that you invited me

of your own free will. I appreciate that. I know why.

MARION [*with rising inflection, tantalizingly*]. Yes?

MRS. BLAKEMORE [*beginning to be a little nettled at MARION'S coolness and quiet defence, but trying not to show her feeling*]. Won't you be frank also? You knew about that unfortunate automobile accident. You knew the *truth* about it. You saw those contemptible, lying stories in the papers. You knew there was some gossip. Your pride was aroused. You were afraid something might be definitely fixed. You determined to forestall everything by inviting me here. You planned a bold, a brilliant coup. I congratulate you, I thank you.

MARION [*quietly*]. I knew you did not in the least understand, Mrs. Blakemore.

[*Silence for a moment, as MRS. BLAKEMORE stares at MARION amazed.*]

MRS. BLAKEMORE [*slowly, incredulously*]. Then you mean——

MARION [*very quietly*]. I mean that I invited you here because I wished to meet the woman who was becoming such a close friend of my husband.

MRS. BLAKEMORE [*rises*]. Mrs. Stanton!

MARION [*rises*]. I regret if I must seem discourteous while you are in my house, but I am glad the explanation has been forced. I know all about this "friendship." I can guess what you think. I know what he thinks he thinks, and I've invited you here——

WILSON [*at centre door*]. Mr. Oliver Whitney!

[*Enter WHITNEY, a good-looking, well-bred New Yorker, thirty-nine. He has a good sense of humor and sufficient experience to give him a sympathetic perspective on life; also he has the large heart of the bachelor, not sufficiently close to any one woman to have the inevitable petty annoyances of the relationship obtrude themselves. WHITNEY is entering, all smiles. When he catches sight of MARION and MRS. BLAKEMORE standing face to face he stops short, an expression of amazement, almost consternation, showing for an instant on his face. WILSON remains on stage.*]

MARION [*with quick cordiality of a woman bred to social exigencies*]. Oliver! [*Holds out her hand.*]

MRS. BLAKEMORE [*with the delight of one who sees a friend and possible ally*]. Oliver!

WHITNEY [*recovering himself and smiling with appreciation*]. How are you both? This is bully.

MARION [*aside to WILSON*]. Tell Mr. Stanton Mr. Whitney has arrived. [WILSON bows. Exits.]

WHITNEY [*coming forward and shaking hands with MARION*]. Hope I'm not late, Marion. You know my failing.

MARION [*lightly*]. One must always be late for a family dinner, Oliver. To be early does not show proper intimacy.

WHITNEY [*quizzically, looking at MRS. BLAKEMORE*]. Family dinner?

MARION. Yes. The families and you—and— [*Indicates MRS. BLAKEMORE with friendly gesture.*] I see you already know Mrs. Blakemore.

WHITNEY [*enjoying the situation*]. Oh, yes, delightful.

MRS. BLAKEMORE [*sits left of table*]. Yes. Oliver and I are very old and dear friends.

[WHITNEY is crossing to MRS. BLAKEMORE as she speaks.]

Don't you remember the last time I saw you, Oliver? You were a true friend in distress.

WHITNEY [*pretending to think*]. I—don't recall it.

MRS. BLAKEMORE [*casually as though speaking of*

the most trivial matter]. Why I haven't seen you—have I—since you picked Mr. Stanton and me out of that ditch just beyond New Haven, after we went over racing you.

WHITNEY [*for a moment completely knocked off his poise, stares at her; then he sneaks a look at MARION. She is momentarily shocked but quickly recovers and is apparently oblivious that anything unusual has been said*]. Er—I—ah—I don't believe you have. [*With over-enthusiasm.*] How are you? You're all right now?

MRS. BLAKEMORE. Oh, yes. But I never will forget how funny you looked when I came to in your machine, with—[*starts to say "Howard"—catches herself, changes to*]—Mr. Stanton, holding my head and you slapping my wrists. [*Laughing.*] You did look so funny. I don't believe I ever thanked you.

WHITNEY [*still flustered*]. Oh, that's all right. I frequently look funny.

MARION [*pleasantly*]. Yes. Being a hero does not agree with you, Oliver. You look funny now.

WHITNEY. Do I? Absurd! Why should I?

MARION [*innocently*]. I don't know. Why should you——

[WHITNEY is standing, looking more or less

like a fool, when WILSON appears centre.

MARION *turns to WILSON.*]

Yes, Wilson?

WILSON. Mr. Stanton says, ma'am, he is very, very busy, and he will be down when the others have come.

MARION. Very well, Wilson.

[WILSON *exits.*

[MARION *turns to the others.*] The man evidently bungled my message. He's a perfect fool, I think, sometimes. I'll get Howard. [*Rises, smiling.*] He would never forgive me if I allowed him to miss these delightful reminiscences.

WHITNEY [*grimly*]. Yes. I would like him to be in on this.

MARION [*at the door*]. I know you two will be able to amuse each other. [*Exits.*

[WHITNEY *brings chair over to MRS. BLAKEMORE, left.*]

WHITNEY [*after a pause, blandly curious*]. Not that I wish to seem discourteous, Elizabeth, but how did you get here?

MRS. BLAKEMORE [*smiling, coolly*]. I was invited, as you were, I presume, Oliver.

WHITNEY [*with slight hardening of his tone*]. Stanton asked you?

MRS. BLAKEMORE. My friend, Mrs. Stanton, Oliver dear.

[OLIVER *whistles.*]

MRS. BLAKEMORE. Oliver!

WHITNEY [*smiling*]. You ought to forgive admiration, Puss. You're a wiz—you're two wizes.

MRS. BLAKEMORE [*smiling*]. The admiration is genuine? [*He nods.*] Then prove it.

WHITNEY. Well—— [*Rises as though to approach her.*]

MRS. BLAKEMORE [*motioning him back with both hands*]. Not when we're alone. I'll take the tête-à-tête proofs for granted. You see I've had plenty of that kind.

WHITNEY. Oh, you mean—— [*Notices pearl collar.*] By Jove! Elizabeth, what handsome pearls!

MRS. BLAKEMORE [*amused*]. Think so? I like them.

WHITNEY. Stanton?

MRS. BLAKEMORE [*shakes head, smiling*]. Don't you recognize them? [*He comes closer, then shakes his head.*] I had them made into a collar—more serviceable than a rope. [*He indicates himself with an amazed gesture. She nods smiling.*] I knew you wouldn't mind.

WHITNEY [*looks at collar with amused, retrospective air of an old man regarding the delightful follies of his past youth*]. Honest? Was I ever that young?

MRS. BLAKEMORE [*reproachfully*]. Oliver!

WHITNEY. Yes, Puss, you are three wizes. [*Moves away, sits down, amused.*]

MRS. BLAKEMORE [*pathetically*]. Be very nice to me to-night, won't you, Oliver dear?

WHITNEY. Well, will I? You just watch.

MRS. BLAKEMORE. I mean when Howard is looking.

WHITNEY. Oh! [*Bends over suddenly convulsed with laughter. MRS. BLAKEMORE watches him in puzzled fashion. WHITNEY straightens up. Pause.*] I wouldn't have missed it for—— [*Pauses thoughtfully.*] Really, Puss, the only thing lacking to make this affair a perfect success is a Mrs. Oliver Whitney.

MRS. BLAKEMORE [*most seductively, but thoughtfully*]. I wonder? Could that be arranged?

WHITNEY [*looks at her a moment, then rises, takes chair over right. With decision*]. I'm sure it couldn't.

MRS. BLAKEMORE. Why sure, Oliver?

WHITNEY [*sadly, with an undercurrent of malicious fun*]. No woman will ever take me.

MRS. BLAKEMORE [*indignantly, with open admiration*]. I don't see why not?

WHITNEY. Perfectly simple. [*Smiles.*] Because I never will ask any, dear.

STANTON and MARION enter together.

STANTON [*entering centre, cordially*]. Ah, Oliver, how are you? Wilson always bungles Marion's message. I'm sorry to have kept you waiting.

WHITNEY. Oh, I didn't miss you.

MRS. BLAKEMORE. Won't you show me your conservatory, Mr. Stanton. You've told me so much about it.

STANTON. Why, certainly. [*Both exit chatting.*]

MARION [*watches STANTON and MRS. BLAKEMORE off and then turns to OLIVER with decision*]. Oliver, will you do me a favor?

WHITNEY. Of course.

MARION. Will you be very nice to me to-night?

WHITNEY. Well, will I? [*In tone that implies amusement with undercurrent of seriousness.*] You just watch.

MARION. I mean when my husband is looking? [*WHITNEY is amused, but he is also touched.*]

WHITNEY [*after a strict pause, with sincere feeling*].

Something seems to tell me that I'm going to be the belle of this party. Do you love him, Marion?

MARION. What is this, Oliver, a cross-examination?

WHITNEY. May I answer truthfully?

MARION. Of course.

WHITNEY. It is a proposal of marriage.

MARION. Oliver Whitney, are you serious?

WHITNEY. Now, Marion, forget you are a woman and be sane.

MARION. Had we not both better try to be?

WHITNEY [*becoming serious*]. I am sane. That is why I have spoken, because I have the right to speak.

MARION. The right?

WHITNEY. Yes. An uninterrupted honorable love of eight years has rights. It has the right to come to you when you are in perplexity, in distress, to let you know that it is at your service, ready, waiting, eager to be used in any way that you may see fit. Child, everybody who knows us both knows that I love you. [*Sits.*] And I would not have you break the littlest of our silly conventions for my sake. Therefore, I am here, ready to do the smallest service or receive the greatest honor. Do you love him?

MARION [*with sincere feeling*]. Yes, I love him, Oliver.

WHITNEY [*looks away a moment, then turns to her with a smile*]. Then we must show Mrs. Blakemore up.

MARION [*with determination*]. I'm going to. [*Falters a little.*] But, Oliver, don't laugh at me. [*Breaks a little.*] I'm afraid——

WHITNEY. Afraid?

MARION. Yes. She isn't the least bit like what I expected.

WHITNEY [*amused in spite of himself*]. What did you expect?

MARION. Oh, you know the kind—— [*With gesture indicating marcelled hair and exaggerated costume and very superior air.*] You can see them in certain restaurants and at some first nights, and no matter how well they are dressed anything honest makes them seem cheap.

WHITNEY [*gently amused and reproving*]. Your modesty doesn't do you credit. Did you think Howard would fall for one of the gold-purse brigade?

MARION. I did think she would be that kind; I did not believe he could really care for that sort. I did not want to be jealous, hysterical, and lose

him. I wanted to be different. I wanted to show him how foolish he was. I determined to invite her here, thinking it would be obvious. [*Bitterly. Turns to mantel.*] As it turns out, the only obvious thing is that I was a fool.

WHITNEY [*rises*]. And now you are losing your nerve?

MARION [*with sudden decision*]. No! I'm not. She must be that way at heart, even if it doesn't show on the surface. I'll—— [*Crosses to him to front of sofa, stops short, thinking; piteously.*] I—I just couldn't stand losing—Oliver. [*Brushes her hand over her eyes. He smiles tenderly with understanding, sympathy, and encouragement.*] I—love—him——

WHITNEY [*with sympathy and understanding*]. She's a quitter at heart. Thieves generally are. And one thing else—may I give you a little lesson in men?

MARION. Please.

WHITNEY. When love is dead the man jumps to the opposite extreme in type; when love is chilled by drifting or lack of sympathy, he hunts up some one to give him sympathy. She gives him sympathy, that's all. I think he loves you, child. Put

that between your teeth and run off with the race.

MARION. Thanks, I will. [*With fine mixture of sympathy for him and appreciation of his generous help, lays hand on his just as MRS. BLAKEMORE and STANTON come down stage. STANTON is still a bit sulky and plainly shocked at seeing MARION and WHITNEY practically holding hands.*]

MRS. BLAKEMORE [*pointedly*]. My! How interested. What is it?

MARION [*looking up brightly*]. Oliver was just giving me a lesson in love.

STANTON. Interesting?

[*MARION and WHITNEY look at each other and both laugh rather foolishly.*]

MRS. BLAKEMORE. It was.

WHITNEY [*looking up with cool audacity*]. You ought to know, Puss. [*Moves to MRS. BLAKEMORE. Lets the pet name drawl out fondly to STANTON'S evident surprise and MRS. BLAKEMORE'S annoyance.*] Marion somehow seems to doubt my ability as a teacher. Will you recommend me, Puss?

MRS. BLAKEMORE [*with affected lightness*]. I? I couldn't. [*With hint of challenge.*] How could I recommend you as a lover?

WHITNEY [*stares at MRS. BLAKEMORE reproachfully*]. The ingratitude of woman! [*Turns to MARION.*] Well, I hope you are not going to be that way.

MARION. I promise to remember.

[*From the interview with MARION on throughout the play WHITNEY assumes a lover-like attitude toward MRS. BLAKEMORE, to her intense annoyance and disgust.*]

WHITNEY [*with satisfaction*]. That ought to help some.

[*STANTON is plainly startled and irritated at WHITNEY'S attitude toward MRS. BLAKEMORE.*]

MARION [*noticing MRS. BLAKEMORE'S pearls*]. What a beautiful collar! I've never seen such exquisitely matched pearls.

MRS. BLAKEMORE [*moves to WHITNEY*]. Yes, it is beautiful. A very tiresome old man gave it to me years ago when I was a girl. When men who are too lazy to work or have too much money for their own good grow old, they nearly always take up some foolish hobby like matching jewels or collecting bric-a-brac. Don't you think so, Mr. Whitney?

WHITNEY [*looking meaningly at MRS. BLAKEMORE*].

Bric-a-brac is good. Won't you show me the conservatory?

MRS. BLAKEMORE. Why certainly.

[*They move up stage. WHITNEY looks at STANTON. MRS. BLAKEMORE and WHITNEY exit centre chatting. He is evidently enjoying himself hugely.*]

MARION [*with admiration*]. A stunning looking couple.

[*During the following scene with STANTON, MARION'S real love for him must show through whenever opportunity offers and he is not looking. The love must be indicated by silent acting, little involuntary movements of her body toward him, slight gestures indicating affection, facial expression, and repressed feeling when he is turned away from her.*]

STANTON. I don't like that fellow Whitney—never did.

MARION. I don't complain of your friends, Howard.

STANTON. Of course not. How could you?

MARION. Yes, Mrs. Blakemore is all I expected—and more. I'm so glad I asked her.

STANTON [*trying to appear impersonal*]. She is an extremely clever woman.

MARION. So Oliver says. Now I thought her more beautiful than clever, but Oliver agrees with you. I did not know before they had been such close friends. [*Goes to curtains.*] Isn't it fortunate we invited him, too?

STANTON. I don't see that it is particularly fortunate.

MARION [*with assurance*]. Oh, you need not really be jealous of him. Their affair, I have reason to believe, has been over some time.

STANTON. Oh, you know all about it?

MARION [*doubtfully*]. Yes—something.

STANTON. Really!

MARION. I don't know that Oliver behaved just as he should. But men are all alike, I presume.

STANTON. Do you mean to tell me that cad has been talking to you about Mrs. Blakemore?

MARION [*airily*]. Oh, my gracious goodness, no! We had so much else to talk about. He would not talk of it. He's a gentleman. Things are just in the air, you know. [*Down to fireplace.*] Fortunate we invited him, too. Makes everything so congenial.

STANTON. A very pleasant party!

MARION [*with sincerity*]. I have enjoyed it.

STANTON. You and Whitney?

MARION [*back of sofa*]. Yes. Oliver and I are very old friends—very dear friends. Let me see, the first time Oliver proposed to me was eight years ago.

STANTON [*centre, sneering*]. And the last time?

MARION. My dear Howard, I don't ask you any questions.

STANTON [*outraged*]. You mean he has dared to make love to you here?

MARION [*wearily*]. My dear boy, how stupid of you! Men are all alike.

STANTON [*sternly*]. Marion, you are my wife.

MARION. Yes, Howard; you are my husband!
[*They confront each other.*]

STANTON [*violently*]. I tell you, I am not going to have that man making love to my wife.

MARION [*reproachfully*]. Howard, I have not curtailed any of your privileges, why should you curtail my—

STANTON [*with a gasp of horror*]. Privileges?

MARION. You seem to forget we may be divorced.

STANTON. What of that? That does not give

him any right to make love to you, or you to listen. I am giving you the divorce, I'm doing the transgressing for this family—all of it!

MARION [*left centre, pleasantly*]. Well, I'm glad you're going to assume some of the responsibilities of married life.

[*They are confronting each other when MRS. LIVINGSTONE enters on a situation that is evidently strained.*]

MRS. LIVINGSTONE. Good evening, chil—[*sees angry look on STANTON'S face and changes greeting*]—my child! Good evening, Mr. Stanton.

STANTON [*shaking hands*]. Good evening, Mrs. Livingstone. [*Stands a moment awkward before her coldness, then blurts.*] I'll tell the others.

[*Exits hastily up stage right.*]

MRS. LIVINGSTONE [*right*]. Every time I enter you two seem to be quarrelling.

MARION [*left centre, throwing her arms suddenly about her mother's neck and kissing her*]. Mother, I'm so happy!

MRS. LIVINGSTONE. H'm! If quarrelling with your husband makes you happy it's a wonder you're not giggling all the time.

MARION [*enthusiastically*]. Mother, it's going

splendidly, my plan. [*Joyously, moves to right.*] He loves me! It's a wonderful thing to have your husband love you.

MRS. LIVINGSTONE [*sniffing*]. It's a novelty anyhow. But this—what I saw?

MARION [*right centre*]. Yes, mother—he doesn't know it, you see. [*Pause. Then with ecstatic happiness.*] If you hadn't just come in, he'd have slapped me!

MRS. LIVINGSTONE. Marion, are you crazy?

MARION. Yes, mother, crazy—crazy with happiness. When was the last time father slapped you, mother?

MRS. LIVINGSTONE [*in horror*]. Marion!

MARION. Why? Didn't he ever slap you, mother—almost, even? [*The two look at each other, then the look of horror dies out of Mrs. LIVINGSTONE'S face. She softens, blushes, finally smiles with reminiscent tenderness. MARION shakes finger at her.*] Almost, mother?

MRS. LIVINGSTONE [*hesitating*]. He did—almost, once. [*Hastily.*] But that was a long time ago.

MARION. Mother! [*The two throw themselves into each other's arms.*]

MRS. LIVINGSTONE [*after a long embrace, broken*

by little gurgling sounds of joy on both sides, releasing herself, and wiping away a suspicion of tears]. Your mother is an old fool, child, and don't you dare tell your father. [*Goes to right.*]

[MR. and MRS. BOB LIVINGSTONE *enter centre, unannounced.* BOB LIVINGSTONE *is a very tall, erect, perfectly conventional New Yorker of twenty-six. He is absurdly fond of his little wife, and she takes the greatest delight in bossing him.*]

MARION. Welcome to the bride and groom.

SALIE [*kissing* MARION]. We are old married people, aren't we, Robert?

BOB [*agreeing eagerly*]. I should say so.

SALIE. Don't say so that way. You are worse than Marion.

BOB [*goes right; meekly*]. Yes, dear.

MARION [*to* MR. LIVINGSTONE]. That's right—jump through the hoop, Bobby.

BOB. Forget it, Marion.

SALIE. As I told you, Marion, you know I don't want to criticise, but as I told you, if you only started out right. Now Bobby and I will never have any trouble in our family, will we, Bobby? [*Moves over to* BOBBY *affectionately, then suddenly*]

pauses.] Is that a thread or a hair on your shoulder? [*Quickly grabs at shoulder, jealousy, then relieved.*] Oh, a thread.

BOB. Yes, dear, of course it was a thread.

MARION. That's right, Bobby. Put that down in your little book—one narrow escape.

WILSON. Mr. and Mrs. Edward Morris!

MARION [*coming to meet them*]. Ned, dear, you look handsome enough to kiss.

MORRIS [*as he shakes hands*]. Cross my heart, I won't fight.

MARION. I'll send it to you by Belle. [*Kisses BELLE.*]

MRS. BELLE MORRIS. Don't make Ned any more conceited, Marion. He firmly believes now all the women are running after him. I tell him if he can hold one he's lucky. That's all the Lord provided for one man.

MARION. Be careful, dear. There's a great tendency nowadays to help the Lord out. [*MARION goes down stage right, calls across.*] Bobby!

BOB. Yes. [*Crosses to MARION.*]

MARION. Some one here to-night will interest you, Bobby. Thought I would let you know in advance.

BOB. Yes?

MARION. Mrs. Blakemore.

BOB [*aghast*]. Puss? Here?

MARION. "Puss?" How appropriate.

BOB. Marion! How could you let her be invited?

MARION. Do you think she would tell Salie of that romantic near-drowning and your affair last year at Palm Beach?

BOB [*under his breath*]. If Salie should find out, what will happen?

MARION. I don't know, Bobby. You'd better put that down in your book.

MORRIS [*coming to them*]. What's the conspiracy?

MARION. Oh, I was just speaking to Bobby of a guest I invited you to meet. She's so attractive she's carried off both Oliver Whitney and Howard.

MORRIS. Well, any woman who can interest that old rake Whitney is worth knowing. Who is she?

MARION. Mrs. Blakemore.

MORRIS. Wha—wha—what? Who—not Eliz——

MARION [*very distinctly*]. Mrs. Elizabeth Blakemore—Puss.

MORRIS [*with startled exclamation*]. Eh—aw!

MARION. Is she your puss, too?

MORRIS. Er—aw—isn't that the lady, Bobby, you introduced me to?

BOB. Never heard of her before in my life.

MARION. Then you introduce him, Ned.

MORRIS [*down stage to him*]. You liar!

BOB. Come on, call me that in front of your wife and let me explain.

Enter GENERAL LIVINGSTONE.

MARION. Dad!

GENERAL. My little girl! [*Kisses her fondly.*]

[*MARION takes her father's hand and MRS. LIVINGSTONE'S hand, standing between them. Gayly turns to lead them to the others down left, when MRS. BLAKEMORE, with STANTON on one side and WHITNEY on the other, enter up stage right.*]

MARION [*gayly, and loud enough to draw attention of all*]. Ah, here are the truants.

MRS. BLAKEMORE. I hope we did not keep you waiting.

MARION. Oh, no. Mrs. Stanton, may I present Mrs. Blakemore? Mrs. Blakemore, my father, General Livingstone. [*At name LIVINGSTONE, MRS.*

BLAKEMORE *starts slightly.*] My mother, Mrs. Blakemore; Mrs. Edward Morris, Mrs. Robert Livingstone. You know my brother and——

MRS. BLAKEMORE. Oh, yes, I've had the pleasure of meeting Mr. Morris and Mr. Livingstone.

[MORRIS and BOB, *still linked arm in arm, have been standing petrified during the introductions.* MRS. BLAKEMORE *comes to them with both hands outstretched.*]

My dear old friends!

[MRS. BELLE MORRIS and SALIE *move forward.* MRS. BLAKEMORE *holds out a hand to each of the men, so that she gets one left and one right hand, the three making a little ring.* MRS. MORRIS *looks at MRS. BLAKEMORE and starts forward indignantly from left to centre, where she stands like an avenging nemesis surveying her husband and MRS. BLAKEMORE.*]

Isn't this delightful?

MORRIS and BOB. How do you do? Delightful!

[MARION *moves down centre.* MORRIS *all up in the air.* Startled jealous rush to centre by SALIE; *stands there with MRS. MORRIS.*]

WHITNEY. I always said, Marion, you were a

wonder at getting up interesting and congenial parties. What's your little game?

MARION. Game! I'm having the time of my life—playing "Puss in the corner."

SALIE. Bobby—Bobby—you never told me you knew Mrs. Blakemore.

MRS. BLAKEMORE. Oh, yes, your husband and I are very old friends.

BOBBY. Oh, yes. Where was it we met?

MRS. BLAKEMORE. Why, you remember, two years ago—Atlanta.

BOBBY. Oh, yes, Atlanta.

SALIE. Such good friends and you don't remember the first meeting?

MRS. STANTON. Of the Virginia Blakemores, Farquhar County—

MRS. BLAKEMORE. Oh, no, my family came from Georgia.

BELLE MORRIS [*coming forward*]. Surprising we've not met before; I know most of Edward's friends.

MARION. Rather surprising if you had met before, I should say, Belle. New York is a large place.

MRS. BLAKEMORE. And I've been here such a short time. You are such a charming hostess. One would think you had tried to get all my old friends—

MARION. This is such a small party, I could hardly expect to have all your old friends.

GENERAL LIVINGSTONE. We should all be glad this happy meeting has been brought about. [*Bows to MRS. BLAKEMORE.*]

STANTON. Won't you come and see my new billiard table and how I've arranged the room?

GENERAL LIVINGSTONE. We'll scarcely have time before dinner, Howard.

STANTON. Oh, yes. I'll tell you a secret—a new cook.

MARION. A new cook?

MRS. LIVINGSTONE. I can't see why a new cook should be cause for alarm. I trained Marion in housekeeping.

MRS. BLAKEMORE. I should like to see the billiard room.

[*Exit MRS. BLAKEMORE with STANTON centre. The men all follow her out. First, the GENERAL, then BOBBY, then MORRIS, each excusing himself to his wife. The ladies stand aghast. SALIE comes down to BELLE.*]

SALIE. I think, Belle, I should like to see that table.

BELLE [*indignantly*]. So should I. [*Start for centre door*].

MRS. STANTON. She seems a charming woman.

SALIE [*as she exits with BELLE*]. But where's her husband, that's what I should like to know.

[MRS. LIVINGSTONE and MRS. STANTON follow BELLE MORRIS and SALIE off, leaving MARION and WHITNEY alone.]

WHITNEY. Won't you come, Marion?

MARION. Oliver, you won't desert me, will you?

WHITNEY [*puts his arms about her shoulders affectionately*]. Poor little woman, buck up.

MARION. What's the use of bucking up if she bucks off with him?

WHITNEY. There, there! Keep your nerve.

MARION. Nerves? I never knew I had so many.

STANTON [*reënters; stares at WHITNEY and MARION*]. Marion, what are you doing?

MARION. Doing? I'm tying Oliver's tie.

[*Almost goes into WHITNEY'S arms. They stand in loverlike attitude to STANTON'S amazement and rage.*]

Curtain

ACT III

ACT III

SCENE: *The dining-room in HOWARD STANTON'S house. A large handsome room finished in dark tones, with hangings and draperies of deep rich red and maroon. At the rear centre a large handsome mantel with wood finishings. On either side of mantel are arched doorways leading into the conservatory, which is in plain view. On right up stage, a door to butler's pantry; on right down stage, a door to other part of house. On left down stage, double doors leading in from main hall. Just above doors up stage, an old-fashioned eight-day clock, evidently an heirloom. Dinner table is near the centre, a little to the right, so that the fire throws a glow over the table and the people seated there. The room is lighted with candles on the dinner table and the glow of the fire.*

DISCOVERED: *It is near the close of the dinner announced at the end of Act II. They are seated about the table in the following order: MARION; to her right, BELLE MORRIS, then BOB LIVINGSTONE,*

MRS. STANTON, GENERAL LIVINGSTONE, MRS. BLAKEMORE, HOWARD, SALIE, MORRIS, MRS. LIVINGSTONE, and OLIVER on MARION'S left. WILSON and the second man are just bringing the coffee. The women are all in high spirits, as are GENERAL LIVINGSTONE and OLIVER; but the other three men show signs of being on a decided strain. At the rise of the curtain GENERAL LIVINGSTONE is bending toward MRS. BLAKEMORE, talking earnestly in a low tone; the others watching him more or less amused.

MRS. BLAKEMORE. Come, come, General! You gentlemen of the old school are too gallant.

GENERAL LIVINGSTONE [*confidentially*]. Now, now, that was a secret. You must not let Mrs. Livingstone know how prettily I pay compliments. She'll be making me do it all the time.

MARION [*across table*]. Will you listen to that dear old humbug!

MRS. LIVINGSTONE. Do I understand that you really can pay compliments?

SALIE. *He's* been flirting shamefully. As a married woman I felt almost compelled to interfere.

[MRS. BLAKEMORE and GENERAL LIVINGSTONE *make laughing protests.*]

WHITNEY [*raps upon table and rises*]. Being the only unmarried and therefore unprejudiced man at the table I feel called to the judicial position. [*Dryly.*] Now, siren, what have you to say for yourself?

MRS. BLAKEMORE. Am I allowed counsel?

WHITNEY [*looking in succession at MORRIS, STANTON, and BOB*]. I dare counsel to appear.

THE THREE MEN. Dare? Why—I——

SALIE. Robert!

BOB [*meekly*]. Yes, dear.

MRS. BLAKEMORE [*satirically to BOB*]. And I was just about to choose you.

WHITNEY. The sentence of the court is that General Livingstone shall pay a compliment aloud to each lady present at once.

GENERAL LIVINGSTONE. Impossible!

THE WOMEN. General! For shame!

WHITNEY. The condemned refuses.

GENERAL LIVINGSTONE [*with a courtly bow to ladies*]. He must refuse. The most charming things would merely be truth.

[WILSON comes in through doors down stage left. Bends over and speaks low to STANTON.]

WHITNEY. What chance have we young fellows against that?

STANTON [*to WILSON, low*]. Tell him I cannot see him. [WILSON *exits*.]

MORRIS [*seeing HOWARD is disturbed*]. Anything important, Howard?

STANTON [*irritated*]. Newspaper reporter. [*The two men exchange glances*.]

MORRIS. Oh!

BOB. What's his name, Howard? I know some of those fellows.

SALIE. I wish, Bobby, you'd be more careful with whom you associate. You'll be mixed up in some scandal next. [*There is a general but discreet gasp at SALIE'S speech*.]

BOB. If I am, dear, you'll thank heaven I know them. They're the squarest bunch in the world—to their friends.

[MARION *has been watching STANTON closely*.]

MARION. Bobby asked you the name, Howard.

STANTON. Er—ah—Lynch, I believe.

MRS. BLAKEMORE [*with a shiver*]. Sounds horribly Southern.

MARION. Perhaps it's important. Had you not better see him?

[WILSON *re-enters and STANTON looks at him inquiringly*.]

STANTON. What is it, Wilson?

WILSON [*comes over, speaks low*]. Beg pardon, sir, but the reporter says it's very important, and you'll regret it if you don't see him.

MRS. STANTON. What impertinence!

MRS. LIVINGSTONE. I don't know what we're coming to in this country!

BELLE. It is a threat. The idea! Edward, why don't you speak to him?

MORRIS [*crushingly*]. This is something you know nothing of, dear.

SALIE [*with contempt*]. And he is your friend, Bobby—my husband's friend.

BOB [*devoutly*]. Yes, praise heaven.

MARION. Don't you think you had better see him, Howard?

GENERAL LIVINGSTONE. Marion, you cannot expect Howard to be bullied into receiving such a person. It's an outrage.

MRS. BLAKEMORE. I think nowadays people of position are too lenient with that class. The papers are taking advantage of it. They are becoming entirely too aggressive and impertinent, attempting to regulate the entire community. For my own part, I make it a rule never to speak to one of them.

WHITNEY [*drawing*]. Yes, I know a lot of people that way.

STANTON [*to WILSON*]. Show the reporter out, Wilson.

WILSON. Yes, sir. [*Moves down stage left. Exits.*]

BELLE. Do papers in the South take such unwarranted liberties, Mrs. Blakemore?

MRS. BLAKEMORE. Oh, my goodness, no. If you don't want anything in, you call up the editor and tell him so, and he keeps it out.

MARION. I think we will give you gentlemen a chance at your cigars.

GENERAL LIVINGSTONE. I hate sitting around a table after dinner. May we smoke in the conservatory, Howard?

STANTON. Certainly, General.

[*Men except BOB follow the GENERAL and STANTON into conservatory through archway at rear to right of fireplace.*]

MRS. LIVINGSTONE. Marion likes going this way to the drawing-room after dinner. It's a pleasant little make-believe country trip.

MRS. STANTON. Yes. The conservatory is beautiful. Such splendid care of it shows Howard's taste. The Stanton men are all fond of flowers.

[*Women exit through archway to left of fireplace. MARION remains on, detained by BOBBIE. When others are off she comes down stage followed by him.*]

BOB [*desperately*]. Marion, what are we going to do?

MARION. We? [*Shakes head.*] Oh, no, what are you going to do, Bobbie?

BOB [*pitiably*]. But something must be done—I know her. If she isn't stopped she'll be coming here, coming here and calling me Bobbie—Bobbie—Bobbie—just as she used to. Only it won't sound the same now—and soon Salie will be divorced. Oh, Marion, you must save me.

MARION. Poor boy. You're in a blue funk, I know. Salie has been putting you through the bride's third degree. You've been over the jumps—she told me of those two whole evenings of miserable happiness she spent with a wet handkerchief forgiving you stuff you confessed about your terrible past—fake stuff it was, Bobbie—and if she finds out this real thing!

BOB. But why did you let him invite her here?

MARION. I didn't let him.

BOB. But you could have prevented it.

MARION. I suppose you mean why didn't I tell Howard of your affair a year ago at Palm Beach?

BOB. Yes.

MARION [*pretending to be horrified*]. Bobbie! How can you? Don't you remember I gave you my solemn word not to say anything about it? You've never released me from that promise. I couldn't tell Howard. Anyhow, with men I've noticed the best way is to let them find out for themselves.

BOB. Then there's only one thing to be done: I release you from your promise. You must tell Howard.

MARION [*shaking her head*]. Oh, no. You must tell Howard.

BOB. I—I—but—oh—Marion, you know *him* better than I do.

MARION. You know *her* better than I do.

BOB. Very well. I'll tell him. I'll tell him tonight.

[MORRIS comes on through arch left centre.

Sees the two and starts down toward them.

BOB notices MORRIS. *Lowers his voice.*]

Sh! Old fat Morris—he's the good thing—I introduced him in Washington—thinks she's an angel from heaven—poor sucker.

MORRIS [*coming down stage*]: You two seem to be always conspiring. What is it this time?

MARION. Nothing to alarm you this time. Don't look so worried.

BOB. Gee! Ned, you look all in. What have you got on your mind?

MORRIS. On my mind? Nothing.

MARION. No one ever accused Ned of having anything on his mind.

BOB. All right. I'm going for a smoke. I'll remember, Marion. [*Goes off through arch up stage left.*]

MARION [*to MORRIS*]. Hadn't we better confess?

MORRIS. What makes you think I have anything to confess?

MARION. I don't think, I know.

MORRIS. I don't understand.

MARION. Do you remember the army and navy game last fall? Of course you don't, though. Belle was crazy to go over, but you couldn't take her. You were too busy—with a "client."

MORRIS [*pompously*]. Yes, I was very busy.

MARION. Indeed you were. What an absorbing profession the law is! After the game in the Walton I sat three tables away from you and your "client,"

and you never saw me at all. How you do concentrate——

MORRIS. But if you guessed everything, why did you let her come and me come?

MARION. I didn't think it would do any harm.

MORRIS. What's going to happen?

MARION [*wisely*]. I see. You think if she isn't stopped she'll be coming here and coming here and calling you Ned—Ned—Neddie—just as she used to do—only it won't sound the same, and soon Belle will hear of it and Belle will get a divorce.

MORRIS. Good God! Oh, Marion, Howard must be told.

MARION. I don't honestly believe she'll tell him.

MORRIS. You mean that I must.

MARION. Just as you feel about it. Of course if you'd rather have Belle find out.

MORRIS. I'll tell him. After all, he should understand.

MARION. Yes. I count on your making him understand.

MORRIS. Bobbie knows nothing.

MARION. Bobbie?

MORRIS. He introduced me. Of course he—why to her, he was a child.

MARION. Oh! He introduced you—he was the good thing—he thinks her an angel from heaven—poor——

MORRIS. He doesn't even suspect the truth.

MARION. I'm sure of that.

MORRIS. Of course a woman like Mrs. Blake-more could not be interested in the antics of a raw boy.

MARION. Oh, no. To interest her it requires a man of poise, a man of dignity, experience, brains, substance, of weight—like yourself, for instance, Ned.

MORRIS. It's wonderful how congenial she and I are.

[WHITNEY *appears arch, right centre. Comes down stage.*]

MARION [*seeing* WHITNEY]. Ah, Oliver, have you come to confess?

WHITNEY. I? No. Has Morris been confessing?

MORRIS. Absurd—confess? I? Why how ridiculous!

MARION. Yes—very ridiculous, Ned.

MORRIS [*confused*]. I wish to speak to Howard. He's still in the conservatory?

WHITNEY. He's a—with Mrs. Blakemore.

MORRIS. I'll see him when he's through. [*Starts up stage. Exits left archway.*]

MARION. They are all in it, Oliver. Howard, the worst of all I guess. [*Crosses and sits on sofa down stage right.*]

WHITNEY. Yes.

MARION. And I'm miserable.

WHITNEY. How can I help you?

MARION [*pathetically*]. Love me.

WHITNEY [*amazed*]. Marion! Do you mean it? [*Sits beside her.*]

MARION [*shaking him by the shoulder*]. Pretend to, I mean—don't be stupid. [*Pathetically.*] You promised to help me before dinner and you haven't done a thing yet.

WHITNEY [*with comprehension*]. Oh!

MARION. You're not very complimentary. Would it be so very hard to love me just for a little while?

WHITNEY. Go as far as you like. Don't mind me.

MARION. You are a dear, Oliver. You must make him jealous. If he is jealous I'll know he still cares. If he doesn't—oh, I couldn't stand it if he doesn't. Oliver, you must make him jealous. [*Lays hand on his hand affectionately.*]

WHITNEY. Well, let's get this pretend business started. [*Puts his arm about her waist.*] Dearest!

MARION [*removing his arm.*]. But he isn't here yet.

WHITNEY. Oh, I'm to make an exhibition of myself for Howard, that's the idea?

MARION. Yes. That's the idea—and for her—for Puss, too.

WHITNEY. Puss?

MARION. Don't you call her Puss? Everybody else does.

STANTON *enters conservatory left centre with* MRS. BLAKEMORE.

[*Low.*] There he is now. [*Affectionately.*] Oliver, dearest. [STANTON *starts angrily, takes a step their way and is evidently about to interfere when* MRS. BLAKEMORE *restrains him. During the following scene* STANTON *tries repeatedly to come down to interfere but is restrained each time by* MRS. BLAKEMORE. MARION *solicitously.*] Oliver, dear, has the thought that I may be free soon quite taken away all your powers of speech? [*Low.*] That's pretty good for a starter; follow up.

WHITNEY [*impassioned tone, quite loud.*]. How can

I speak? Oh, to suffer and to struggle hopelessly all these years and then to find myself so near the goal of ultimate desire almost overwhelms me. [*Ecstatically.*] Ah, dearest! [*Low tone.*] Guess that will hold him for a while.

MARION [*then passionately*]. Oliver, don't urge me, dear. Remember I am still married. Don't press me too hard. [*Very low.*] Take my hand, you idiot, you're not pressing anything yet.

[STANTON *is wild with jealousy, but the presence of MRS. BLAKEMORE keeps him in check. MRS. BLAKEMORE is also decidedly curious and doesn't know just what to make of it.*]

Oliver, Oliver, Oliver, here, take this one. [*Giving hand to OLIVER.*] Remember I am still married. Do you love me?

WHITNEY. Look, look! Can you doubt your eyes?

STANTON [*low*]. I won't stand this.

MRS. BLAKEMORE. Oh! [*Places hand on his arm, restrains him.*] Look——

WHITNEY. How soon can the divorce be secured, dearest?

STANTON. I tell you I'm going to break his neck—talking that way to my wife——

MRS. BLAKEMORE. It's splendid, dear—listen!

STANTON. Splendid! Nothing! [*Tries to break away from her; she stops him.*]

MARION. If it had not been for that automobile accident, I might have drifted on to the end of my days and never found out what I really thought. Oh, that—blessed automobile accident.

[*WHITNEY draws her to him.*]

STANTON. This disgraceful exhibition has gone on long enough.

[*MARION and WHITNEY jump up apparently much confused. MRS. BLAKEMOKE slips away out of sight into the conservatory.*]

WHITNEY [*in tone of man caught with the goods but determined to brazen it out. Haughtily.*] Stanton!

MARION [*confused.*] Oh! Howard, were you out there? I didn't know—

STANTON [*bitterly.*] I have been here since the beginning of this disgraceful scene—at least I hope it was since the beginning.

WHITNEY [*confused.*] Why—a—a—why, we thought you were with Mrs. Blakemore.

MARION. Yes.

STANTON [*turns on WHITNEY.*] Whitney, how dare you make love to my wife?

WHITNEY [*angry.*] Stanton! Your wife—OUR

wife! [*They confront each other.*] You can't have 'em all, you know.

MARION. At least allow Oliver the discard, Howard.

STANTON. You, Marion, my wife, you can say that—I can't understand it—I sat there—I could not credit my ears—in my house—you—my wife—forgetting yourself—me—answering the love of such a man—bringing him into this house—such disgrace—have you no shame? [*Turns to WHITNEY.*] And you, Whitney—you—my friend. How have you repaid me! [*When his head is turned MARION shows every sign of happiness, realizing his jealousy is a proof of his love.*] My friend and my wife in my own house. I brought you here—I welcomed you—I trusted you—and this is how you have repaid my trust—my friendship. Have you no manhood? What would you think if I——

MARION. Did you hear that?

STANTON [*fiercely*]. Did I hear what?

MARION. I thought I heard some one throw a brick through a glass house!

[GENERAL LIVINGSTONE and BOB come on through arch right centre.]

GENERAL LIVINGSTONE [*as they come on*]. A re-

markably attractive woman, Robert. Remarkably attractive.

BOB. Yes, sir.

MARION [*down stage*]. All of the other women will believe I'm monopolizing you men. I had better join them. [*With meaning.*] I hope to see all of you in a very few minutes.

STANTON. Certainly.

[WHITNEY *crosses with MARION up stage left; she passes out through the left arch. WHITNEY turns, starts back down stage.*]

GENERAL LIVINGSTONE [*as MARION exits*]. Robert and I were just discussing Mrs. Blakemore, Howard. We agreed that she is a very handsome woman. How did Marion run across her?

STANTON. Er—ah—I don't exactly know.

GENERAL LIVINGSTONE [*right centre*]. Don't know?

WHITNEY [*rejoining others*]. Quite accidentally, wasn't it, Howard?

STANTON. Yes, that's it, quite accidentally.

GENERAL LIVINGSTONE. Oh, I see. Just one of those queer coincidences. The way charming women frequently come together.

WHITNEY [*dryly*]. Exactly. By the way, General, this is just my chance. I've often wanted

to get from your own lips the story of the bullet hole in this interesting bit of statuary. [*Indicates clock. Crosses back of GENERAL LIVINGSTONE to clock.*]

GENERAL LIVINGSTONE [*delighted tone*]. Why, haven't I told you that story?

[WHITNEY looks down stage away from the GENERAL, so audience can catch the look of extreme resignation and boredom on his face.

GENERAL much pleased.]

It was over a woman, of course. Back in 1770 two loves made a serious business. [*Voice sinks lower, talking earnestly, with WHITNEY listening. GENERAL and WHITNEY pass out into conservatory through arch rear centre. MORRIS is sitting at table centre, drinking now and then, smoking vigorously, and plainly worried.*]

BOB [*in front of table, to STANTON, speaking low*]. Well, you played hell with this party.

STANTON [*not knowing what to expect*]. What do you mean?

BOB [*with elaborate sarcasm*]. What do I mean? I mean the weather—the airships—the Japanese war. You know what I mean. I think you played it low down.

STANTON. Look here, Bob, don't go too far. You refer, I presume, to one of our guests.

BOB [*bowing elaborately*]. I do. [*Then with irritation.*] Why was she invited to-night? Of all times to-night?

STANTON [*puzzled*]. Why not to-night?

BOB. Well, don't you think it's very embarrassing when you consider everything?

STANTON. I don't see——

BOB. Why me—Mrs. Blakemore. Suppose Salie should get next? Whew!

STANTON [*dazed*]. You? Mrs. Blakemore?

BOB. Sure! Didn't you know? I thought you must know. I told Marion.

STANTON. You told Marion? [*Looks at BOB in dazed, horrified fashion.*]

BOB. Yes, when I was tied up with Puss——

STANTON [*gasps*]. Puss?

BOB. That's the name I used to call her—pet name.

STANTON. Oh, I see. The name you used to call her.

BOB. Yes. It was last year at Palm Beach. We'd been awful good friends for a long time. She did like me pretty well, so of course I felt like a dog

when I had to do it. But you know I met Salie and fell in love with her. I couldn't stand for the other then, you know, so I went to Marion. Marion is a good fellow: you can't pull the wool over Marion's eyes. I made a clean breast, and Marion figured what to do and got me out.

STANTON [*almost collapses*]. Marion knew? [BOB *nods*.] Got you out?

BOB. That's what she did, dear old girl.

GENERAL LIVINGSTONE [*finishing his story aloud. Enters with WHITNEY*]. So the seconds placed them on either side of the dining-room and they fired across the table. The Englishman's bullet struck that old clock and he crumpled up dead across the room beside the fireplace where all his love-making had been conducted. That was the way my great-grandfather avenged a wrong done a female member of his family. It was proper in those good days.

WHITNEY. But duelling is out of fashion nowadays, General.

GENERAL LIVINGSTONE. A great many of the good customs have gone out of fashion in this damnable era of selfishness. [*Contemptuously*.] But I'm forgetting. You will go with us to the opera?

WHITNEY [*doubtfully*]. You are sure you have room?

GENERAL LIVINGSTONE [*crosses* WHITNEY]. I'll telephone right up and have an extra chair put in the box. [WHITNEY *makes a gesture of protest.*] No trouble, not in the least. [*Crossing to right.*] How-ard, where is the 'phone on this floor? [GENERAL LIVINGSTONE *crosses* BOB *right.*]

STANTON [*coming out of his crushed daze*]. Through this door, General. [*Opens door lower right.*] Can I do anything?

GENERAL LIVINGSTONE [*crosses* STANTON]. No, thank you. [*Exits, closing door.*]

[MORRIS, *with a little gesture of decision, rises from the table and comes to the fireplace to meet* STANTON, BOB *at the same time moving over toward* WHITNEY *on the left.*]

MORRIS [*down right, embarrassed*]. Well, How-ard, it's one on me! I'll have to confess, confidentially, of course, because I need your help.

STANTON [*suspiciously*]. What is it?

MORRIS. I did not think I'd ever be caught with the goods—and after all my lectures to you, too.

STANTON. Caught with the goods? What do you mean? [*Angrily.*] Why can't you speak out?

You lawyers get so in the habit of beating about the bush. Caught with the goods! What goods?

MORRIS [*smiling in asinine fashion*]. Er—ah—very charming goods—you'll admit that—Mrs. Blake-more.

STANTON. My God!

MORRIS. It is bad, I'll admit. But you can understand—after your experience with the mysterious lady in the automobile, can't you, eh?

STANTON. Yes—I'm beginning to understand.

MORRIS [*with huge relief*]. That's the best of having a damned rake for a brother-in-law. When you get in trouble yourself you can come to him.

STANTON [*losing his temper as it sweeps over him what a fool he has been, and mingled with that feeling, the pain of his wounded self-love, lets his voice rise gradually to tone of vibrant anger*]. Yes, a damned rake for a brother-in-law! That's what I have.

MORRIS [*making desperate but vain gestures to quiet him*]. Sh! Howard! Please!

[*The other two come over hurriedly.*]

STANTON [*right*]. Why should I shield you? Yes, a damned rake. How dare you? You, the husband of my innocent sister!

MORRIS. My God! man, you won't tell Belle. She'd leave me in a minute.

STANTON. Why shouldn't she?

MORRIS. But it's all passed. Lose her for what's past!

STANTON. Lose her fortune, you mean?

MORRIS [*angrily*]. Stanton!

BOB [*warningly*]. Howard!

STANTON [*crosses MORRIS to BOB. Whirling on BOB*]. You, too, Livingstone, you are no better. How dare you protest to me! [*To MORRIS.*] He just finished telling me the same.

BOB and MORRIS [*turning to each other, exclaim simultaneously, with wounded pride and amazement*]. You, too! [*Both nod.*]

BOB [*amazement and involuntary anger*]. I introduced you. You took my place.

MORRIS [*angry in turn*]. Somebody had to take it.

BOB. Well, I'll be damned!

STANTON [*between the two, with bitter contempt*]. You both ought to be. [*Indicates MORRIS and BOB.*] Married ten years—married one month—the same. Two modern gentlemen. A nice state of affairs. A pretty state of affairs. A pleasant situation!

[WHITNEY whistles. Puts his hand to his ear

and stands listening intently. The three turn and stare at him. Crosses BOB to right centre. MORRIS moves to cross over, BOB goes up to join them.]

What's the matter with you, Whitney?

WHITNEY [*left centre*]. Oh, nothing. I thought I heard another brick go through that glass house. You are right though, Stanton, it is a pretty situation. Now if we only had the name of the lady in your automobile accident it might be perfect.

STANTON [*centre, suddenly brought to earth*]. Huh! [*Stands with jaw dropped looking at WHITNEY. The situation is held a moment, then GENERAL LIVINGSTONE re-enters at right down stage.*]

GENERAL LIVINGSTONE [*as he enters*]. I managed to have two chairs placed in the box, Whitney. Suppose we take Mrs. Blakemore up with us. I tell you she's a charming woman—makes me feel young again

STANTON [*centre, aside*]. Next!

GENERAL LIVINGSTONE [*right by table*]. What's that, Stanton? Don't you think she's charming?

STANTON [*completely unstrung, with elaborate effort at self-control*]. Yes, I think she's charming. Everybody seems to think she's charming.

GENERAL LIVINGSTONE [*surprised and puzzled*].

Of course—why, if I were young— [Nods his head after the fashion of an old man who has had his conquests. MORRIS and BOB drop down left.]

STANTON [losing all control]. Oh, there's no age limit! I suppose soon you'll be like the rest—calling her Puss and begging me to help you out.

GENERAL LIVINGSTONE. Sir! How dare you? What do you mean?

STANTON. Mean? [Wildly.] I mean—nothing—ask them! [Points dramatically at BOB and MORRIS left, turns and flings himself out through right door lower, slamming it after him. "No Wedding Bells for Me," whistle from WHITNEY.]

GENERAL LIVINGSTONE [amazed, looking after STANTON]. What's the matter with the fellow? Has he gone suddenly insane? [Looks at MORRIS and BOB, who are left. WHITNEY up centre.] What is it? [Crosses WHITNEY.]

MORRIS [hesitating]. Probably—he—ah—has worries of some sort—he's—ah—he's—ah—often abrupt, you know.

BOB [shakes his head, signifying that he cannot explain]. Haven't the slightest idea, father.

GENERAL LIVINGSTONE. But "Puss?" "Puss?" What of "Puss?"

MORRIS and BOB [*together guiltily*]. "Puss?"
What of "Puss?"

WHITNEY [*on GENERAL'S right. Coming to the rescue with a quizzical look at the others*]. That's a pet name, sir—in I may say quite general use. Stanton is worried. I'm sure he hardly realized what he was saying. He's had a great deal to upset him recently—that automobile accident. I'm afraid we teased him a little, and that with this reporter's calling to-night, put him off. I'm sure he'll be back in no time to apologize.

GENERAL LIVINGSTONE [*nodding*]. Ah! To be sure. I'm sorry. He's had his lesson.

WHITNEY [*with emphasis*]. He has!

GENERAL LIVINGSTONE [*to MORRIS and BOB*].
Now you boys stop plaguing him.

MORRIS and BOB. Yes, sir.

[WILSON *enters down stage left, carrying silver salver on which there is a note. Looks about surprised.*]

GENERAL LIVINGSTONE [*crosses BOB and MORRIS*].
What is it, Wilson?

WILSON. A note for Mr. Stanton, sir. That reporter is back.

GENERAL LIVINGSTONE. A note?

[WHITNEY *goes up.*]

WILSON. Yes, sir.

GENERAL LIVINGSTONE [*looking about at the others for confirmation of what he is about to do*]. It's a shame to bother the boy when he's so—excited already. It's some trivial matter doubtless. I suppose it would be all right for me——

MORRIS. I should think so.

BOB. He'll thank you, Dad, for taking it off his hands.

GENERAL LIVINGSTONE. I'll do it. [*Takes note from WILSON and reads, an expression of amazement and anger coming on his face.*] Well! Such impertinence!

BOB. What is it, Dad?

GENERAL LIVINGSTONE [*reads aloud, his voice trembling with indignation*]. "Mr. Stanton—Sir: We have identified positively the lady who was with you at the time of your automobile accident. All the papers are clamoring for the story. We are going to release the story unless you prove our identifications wrong. I would advise your seeing me. HARRY LYNCH, *City News*."

BOB [*gives a low whistle. Down right front of table*]. Whew! That Lynch has a nerve.

GENERAL LIVINGSTONE [*centre, still trembling with*

indignation]. I'll see to this. That poor boy shall not be worried by this damnable hounding any longer.

WHITNEY [*down centre*]. I hesitate about suggesting, General; but don't you think it might be well to have Morris see him instead—as a lawyer Morris could make the necessary threats of libel suit.

GENERAL LIVINGSTONE. Lawyer the devil! This is no time for a lawyer. This is the time for a man! [*To WILSON, grimly threatening.*] Show that reporter in here.

WILSON. Yes, sir. [*Exits down stage left.*]

BOB. Careful, Dad. He's the star man.

GENERAL LIVINGSTONE [*trembling with rage so he can barely speak*]. Careful? Huh! You see I am calm, quite calm!

BOB [*low*]. I wouldn't like to be Lynch.

[LYNCH *enters down stage left, ushered in by WILSON. LYNCH is dressed as in Act I. He glances about room quickly, sees MORRIS, but pays no attention to him; catches BOB's eye, smiles slightly, nods.*]

LYNCH. Hello, Livingstone!

BOB. Evening, Lynch.

GENERAL LIVINGSTONE [*still struggling to suppress his anger*]. Well, sir? [LYNCH looks at him curiously, quite undismayed and rather amused.]

LYNCH. Yes?

GENERAL LIVINGSTONE. I am General Livingstone.

LYNCH [*carelessly, in tone of one getting off stereotyped speech*]. Oh, yes, General, I recognize you. We know most of the big men.

GENERAL LIVINGSTONE [*holding up LYNCH's note*]. What do you mean, sir, by this note?

LYNCH. My note? Isn't it quite plain? I think, though, I addressed it to Mr. Stanton.

GENERAL LIVINGSTONE. Plain! It's too damnable plain! It's despicable, contemptible—black-mail!

LYNCH [*turning to BOB*]. Livingstone, you ought to know better than let your father make such a silly mistake.

WHITNEY [*front of the GENERAL, pleading tone*]. General!

BOB. Dad!

GENERAL LIVINGSTONE [*centre to BOB*]. Hold your tongue, sir. [*To LYNCH*]. I represent Mr. Stanton, and I tell you, sir, I do not propose to have him

hounded in this damnable fashion any longer. I shall hold you personally responsible.

LYNCH. General, you're the fifth man who's said that to me since three o'clock.

GENERAL LIVINGSTONE [*sharp*]. What!

LYNCH. And if you do physically assault me, General, I shall certainly land you in the night court, and collect space on the story—spread on the front page, sure—"Famous old soldier fined for brutally assaulting innocent young newspaper man."

[GENERAL LIVINGSTONE *stands completely dumbfounded, his hands twitching, quivering with rage.*]

GENERAL LIVINGSTONE [*gasps almost tearfully*]. Have you newspaper men no sense of personal decency? Personal dignity?

LYNCH. Don't be too hard on us, General. During business hours our associations are very bad.

GENERAL LIVINGSTONE. What do you mean?

LYNCH. We have the name of the lady who was with Mr. Stanton in his car at the time of his accident. We have learned all about the trip—and we have the woman's name. So I have come to give Mr. Stanton a—

GENERAL LIVINGSTONE [*interrupting*]. Would the papers print that?

LYNCH. Would they print it? Well—— [*Smiles significantly.*]

GENERAL LIVINGSTONE. Then I shall say nothing—but our lawyer will take action.

LYNCH. They'd better take it quick. You'll have fifty reporters up here by to-morrow night. If Mr. Stanton refuses to say anything, we will simply send out the story that the woman in the car with him at the time of his automobile accident was— [*pause, then with dramatic emphasis*—Mrs. Elizabeth Blakemore.

GENERAL LIVINGSTONE [*starting back in amazement*]. Good gracious!

BOB and MORRIS [*turn, face each other, absolute amazement showing on their faces, speak together*]. Well, what do you think of that?

[*WHITNEY alone is not surprised. The situation is held a moment, then STANTON enters down stage right. He does not see LYNCH at first.*]

STANTON [*as he comes on*]. General, I wish to apologize—— [*Stops short, seeing LYNCH.*]

GENERAL LIVINGSTONE [*whirling on STANTON*]. Apologize? Apologize? How dare you, sir! [*Los-*

ing his self-control.] My great-grandfather killed his man for just such an insult——

STANTON [*misunderstanding*]. I did not mean to insult you, General.

WHITNEY [*stepping in between*]. All this can be of no interest to Mr. Lynch. He wants a direct statement. [*Turns to LYNCH.*] I'm sure, Mr. Lynch, if you'll come with me just a moment, Mr. Stanton will give you a statement! [*LYNCH is reluctant to go, but WHITNEY in the most friendly fashion takes him by the arm and practically ushers him out into the hall.*] When you wish to see Mr. Lynch, Stanton, he'll be here with me.

[*Exits after LYNCH, closing the double doors after them.*]

GENERAL LIVINGSTONE [*to STANTON*]. Now, sir, we have only members of the family here. I will settle with you.

STANTON [*amazed*]. Settle with me?

GENERAL LIVINGSTONE. Although you did steal my daughter, I had forgiven you. I had come to think you a gentleman. Even for her sake, I forgave this recent scandal. But such shameful—such dastardly conduct passes all consideration—bringing that woman into this house. Horsewhipping is too good

for you, sir. Palming off this woman on my daughter—your wife. Your innocent wife! If I were only younger. [*Glances toward clock with bullet hole in it.*] They knew better how to settle a case of this kind in the old days.

BOB. I can settle it, father.

STANTON [*turning fiercely on BOB*]. You? [*The men confront each other.*]

GENERAL LIVINGSTONE [*his voice breaking*]. My poor child—she must not know!

MARION [*appearing in archway left centre; looks in reprovingly*]. Haven't you ungallant men finished your cigars? [*Sees the strained attitude of all, comes in quickly.*] What's the matter? [*No one speaks.*] Tell me! What is it?

GENERAL LIVINGSTONE [*mastering his emotion*]. Marion, Mrs. Blakemore must leave this house at once.

MARION. Father! I do not understand.

GENERAL LIVINGSTONE. Don't ask questions, Marion. Just accept your father's word. She must leave, and then I will take you home!

MARION [*shakes her head*]. But Mrs. Blakemore is our guest, father. You are our guest also. You must explain.

STANTON [*right centre*]. That reporter got in, Marion.

MARION [*a light dawning*]. Oh!

GENERAL LIVINGSTONE. You cannot stay with decency under the same roof with the woman whom this scoundrel has palmed off on you.

MARION. I invited Mrs. Blakemore.

GENERAL LIVINGSTONE. Marion!

MARION. I know everything. I knew when I invited her.

GENERAL LIVINGSTONE. Marion, you are insane.

MARION. No, father, only sensible. [*To STANTON.*] Is that reporter still here?

STANTON. In the hall.

MARION. Ask him to come in. [*STANTON hesitates.*] Bring him.

GENERAL LIVINGSTONE. He shall not.

MARION. Father, I told you once what concerns my own life I must settle my own way. I don't want to appear disrespectful, but you cannot coerce me in my own house. [*Walks past him to the door down stage left, opens the door.*] Good-evening, Mr. Lynch. Won't you come in? You, too, Oliver. [*LYNCH and WHITNEY enter, the reporter surprised, rather suspicious.* MARION holds out her hand to

LYNCH.] How are you? This is an unexpected—pleasure.

LYNCH [*sincere tone*]. I hope you will believe me, Mrs. Stanton, when I tell you it is not a pleasure to me to have to come on this errand.

MARION. Thank you, Mr. Lynch.

LYNCH. I'd rather talk to Mr. Stanton.

MARION. Sorry, but—— [*Her manner is pleasant and friendly but firm. LYNCH evidently likes her; with a shrug he accepts situation.*]

LYNCH [*left*]. Then please understand my position and how I regret personally the questions that as a newspaper man I must put. [MARION bows.] Bluntly, Mrs. Stanton, we have the name of that woman.

MARION [*centre*]. Yes?

LYNCH. And we are going to publish it unless it can be proved wrong.

MARION. I'd expect that. Who is she?

LYNCH. Mrs. Elizabeth Blakemore. [LYNCH pronounces the name regretfully. MARION stares at him a moment in amazement, then throws back her head and gives way to a peal of laughter. The men on the stage stare at MARION amazed.]

MARION. Oh, this is too good! Too good! For-

give me, Mr. Lynch. [*Goes off into another peal of laughter, turns to the men.*] Howard, Dad, all of you, did you hear that? What a splendid joke!

[*The men try awkwardly to back her up.*]

GENERAL LIVINGSTONE [*right centre*]. Splendid! Haw! Haw!

BOB [*right*]. Fine! Ha, ha!

MORRIS [*at head of table*]. Ho, ho! I never knew anything like it.

WHITNEY [*left*]. I told Mr. Lynch he was on a cold trail.

LYNCH [*left centre. Grimly*]. You can't laugh me off.

MARION [*struggling for self-control*]. Of course not. But you must forgive me having my laugh first. I'll offer more substantial proof. [*Moves to arch left centre. Calling in her most dulcet tone off left.*] Elizabeth! [*Pause.*] Elizabeth, dear! [*Pause.*] Puss!

MRS. BLAKEMORE [*her voice off stage left*]. Yes, Marion, dear.

[*An amazed gasp from the men. MRS. BLAKEMORE appears at the door.*]

MARION. Come in!

[*MRS. BLAKEMORE enters, looks about quickly,*

almost fearfully. MARION slips her arm about MRS. BLAKEMORE'S waist in reassuring fashion, laughing, but at the same time giving MRS. BLAKEMORE a warning pressure with her arm.]

Don't say a word, dear. The greatest joke you ever heard! Come!

[MRS. BLAKEMORE, following suit, slips her arm about MARION. They come down stage to LYNCH, their arms about each other's waist most affectionately; the men are staring at them dumbfounded. MARION and MRS. BLAKEMORE stop opposite LYNCH. MARION speaks gayly.]

Mr. Lynch of the *City News*, may I present Mrs. Elizabeth Blakemore?

LYNCH [*in amazement*]. Mrs. Blakemore?

MRS. BLAKEMORE [*bowing pleasantly*]. Glad to meet you, Mr. Lynch.

LYNCH [*repeating, dazed*]. Mrs. Blakemore!

MARION [*gayly*]. And you see she's not lame a bit from her broken leg.

MRS. BLAKEMORE. What's the joke?

MARION [*jauntily*]. You would not expect, Mr. Lynch, to find plaintiff and correspondent so friendly.

MRS. BLAKEMORE [*gasping*]. Plaintiff! Correspondent!

MARION. Yes, dear, Mr. Lynch came all the way up from downtown to tell me that I am going to bring a divorce suit against Howard, naming you as correspondent. Now wasn't that sweet of him? [*She keeps her warning pressure about MRS. BLAKEMORE'S waist.*]

MRS. BLAKEMORE [*taking the cue*]. This is awful! Horrible!

MARION. Now, dear, don't lose your sense of humor. [*To LYNCH.*] Are you satisfied, Mr. Lynch?

LYNCH. Forgive me, Mrs. Stanton, but you are so confounded clever you might run in a "ringer." [*Reaches in his pocket, brings out a picture, holds it up and compares the picture with MRS. BLAKEMORE, finally looks up.*] Guess you win, Mrs. Stanton.

MARION. Thanks. [*Bows satirically.*]

LYNCH. Yes, you must be right. I don't believe even you could put your arm about the *other woman*.

[*A suppressed, gasping exclamation from the men.*]

MARION. That observation hardly requires an answer, Mr. Lynch.

LYNCH. Sorry to have disturbed you. Good-night.

ALL [*with relief*]. Good-night.

[LYNCH *exits*. MRS. BLAKEMORE *starts to drop her arm from about MARION.*]

MARION [*seizing MRS. BLAKEMORE'S arm and drawing it back tight about her waist*]. Hold it! Hold it! He came back last time.

[*They stand posed expectantly with set smiles. The door begins to open.*]

Yes, indeed. Quite the handsomest man I have seen in years.

LYNCH [*reopening the door*]. I beg your pardon. [*His face falls as he sees the picture undisturbed.*]

MARION [*sweetly*]. Did you forget your gloves, Mr. Lynch?

LYNCH. Er—ah—I thought so—but I find I was mistaken. Good-night.

MARION and MRS. BLAKEMORE. Good-night.

[*Door closes after LYNCH, the women drop their arms from about each other's waist sharply; then step wide apart with instinctive dislike. There is a moment's awkward pause, while*

the situation is held. Then MARION smiles the conventional smile of a conventional hostess.]

GENERAL LIVINGSTONE. Marion, I insist——

MARION. Father, will you and the boys join the others? They are waiting—Mrs. Blakemore and I will come in a few minutes. [GENERAL LIVINGSTONE *makes as though to speak.*] Father, please.

GENERAL LIVINGSTONE. Very well. [*Crosses left and exits through arch left, followed by WHITNEY, MORRIS, and BOB.*]

MRS. BLAKEMORE [*when door has closed*]. Mrs. Stanton, I don't know how to thank you for what you have just done for me. You've quite disarmed me. You had it in your power to make a very ugly scandal and you saved me. I am powerless. Your generosity beats me.

MARION. Did you think I did that for you? Do you think I could have done it merely for you, Mrs. Blakemore? No—I did it for my husband; for his honor, for his good name; for my own good name. I did it to save his mother the pain and the despair of an ugly scandal; I did it to save my own parents from suffering—I did it to give my husband a chance to realize his true position——

STANTON. I do realize it. [*Turns to* MRS. BLAKEMORE.] Oh, my eyes are opened now—I've been a fool—a dazzled fool, but now I see clearly—you've done that—— [*To* MRS. BLAKEMORE.] You've opened my eyes—you've showed me what a splendid woman my wife is. Thank you, Mrs. Blakemore, for teaching me—and—good-night.

MARION [*to* MRS. BLAKEMORE]. No—I'm through—take him—I give him to you!

[Exits quickly through right door lower.]

MRS. BLAKEMORE. Not for mine; you'll get all that's coming to you after I'm gone. Good-night, my friend, a pleasant evening and good luck.

[Exits double doors left. STANTON stands a moment staring after her, then turns quickly to door down stage right. Calls.]

STANTON. Marion! Marion!

MARION [*enters*]. Has she gone?

STANTON. Has who gone?

MARION. Puss?

STANTON. Oh, she's not my Puss.

MARION. Not your Puss, Howard? Then whose Puss is she?

STANTON. God knows—maybe. Marion, I've loved you all the time. I've been a fool, a weak,

dazzled fool! I love you! Won't you take me back?

MARION. Take you back? Why, I've never even given you up. Do you think I could stand for that cat—Puss, I mean—in this house and me off in Reno?

CURTAIN

